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DOROTHY DAINTY'S GAY TIMES

BY

AMY BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DAINTY SERIES," "THE RANDY BOOKS," AND "A JOLLY CAT TALE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

BOSTON

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DOROTHY DAINTY'S GAY TIMES

DOROTHY DAINTY'S GAY TIMES

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

THE great gateway stood wide open, and through it one could see the fine stone house with its vine-covered balconies, its rare flowers and stately trees.

A light breeze swayed the roses, sending out their perfume in little gusts of sweetness, while across the path the merry sunbeams flickered, like little dancing elves.

Down the path came a lovely little girl, swinging a skipping-rope, and dancing over and under it in perfect time with the song which she was singing.

The sunlight touched her bright curls, making her look like a fairy, and now she skipped backward, and forward, around the circular garden, and back again, only pausing to rest when another little girl ran across the lawn to meet her.

She was Dorothy Dainty, the lovely little daughter of the house, and the sprightly, dark-eyed child who now joined her was Nancy Ferris, her dearest playmate.

"I was just wishing you'd come out, for I've something to tell you," Dorothy said. "You know Aunt Charlotte has all her plans ready for opening her private school next week, and you heard her tell mamma that the class was *very* full."

"Oh, I know it's to be a big class," said Nancy, "for besides all the girls that used to be in it, there's to be one new one, and one *boy*, Katie Dean's cousin, Reginald,

and, — oh, *did* you know that Arabella is to join the class?"

"Why, Nancy, are you *sure?*" asked Dorothy; "only yesterday we looked over toward her house, and there seemed to be no one at home." Nancy's eyes were merry.

"Come and look *now!*" she said, clasping Dorothy's hand, and running with her down to the gate.

"There!" said Nancy, "see all those windows open, and somebody out there behind the house beating a rug; you see they *are* at home, and that's her queer little old Aunt Matilda."

Dorothy looked at the resolute little figure, and wondered how the thin arm could wield the rug-beater with so much energy. She remembered that Arabella had said that her father *always* did as Aunt Matilda

directed, and truly the small woman appeared able to marshal an army of men, if she chose.

"Perhaps Arabella will go over to the public school," said Dorothy; "she doesn't have to enter Aunt Charlotte's private class."

"Oh, but she *will*, I just know she will," Nancy replied, "and Aunt Charlotte'll *have* to let her. You know Mr. Corryville was in your papa's class at college, and if he says he wishes Arabella to join the class, your papa will surely say 'yes.'"

"He certainly will," said Dorothy, "but there's one thing to think of," she said, with a bright smile, "There are nice girls in the class, and if Arabella is queer, we *mustn't* mind it."

"We'll *try* not to," Nancy said, and then, as Dorothy again swung her rope,

Nancy "ran in," and the two skipped around the house together, the rope whipping the gravel walk in time with the dancing feet.

It was cool and shady near the wall, and they sat down upon a low seat where the soft breeze fanned their flushed cheeks.

"I'd almost forgotten something that I meant to tell you," Dorothy said. "You know Aunt Charlotte says that the pupils are to give a little entertainment each month, when we are to have dialogues, songs, solo dances, pieces to be spoken, and chorus music. Well, mamma has arranged to have a fine little stage and curtain. You didn't know that, *did* you?"

"Indeed I didn't," said Nancy, "and I guess the others will be surprised. You haven't told them yet, have you?"

"I only knew it this morning myself,

but I'm eager to tell them," said Dorothy.

"Here's Mollie Merton and Flossie Barnet now," cried Nancy, and, turning, Dorothy saw the two playmates running up the driveway.

"Mollie was over at my house," said Flossie, "and we saw you and Nancy just as you ran around the house, and we thought we'd come over."

"We were wild to know if our private school is *truly* to commence next week. Mamma said it would if enough pupils were ready to join it," said Mollie, "and we knew Katie Dean's cousin was a new one, and won't it be funny to have one boy in the class?"

"Oh, but he is just a *little* boy," said Nancy.

"And he must begin to go to school this

year, and he says he likes girls ever so much better than boys, so he asked if he might go to our school," Dorothy said.

"He *always* says he likes girls best," said Flossie; "isn't he a queer little fellow?"

"I don't know," Mollie said, so drolly that they all laughed.

"And there is a new pupil, who has just come here to live, and she is *very* nice, Jeanette Earl says," and as she spoke Dorothy looked up at her friends, a soft pleading in her blue eyes.

She intended to give a kindly welcome to the new pupil, and she hoped that the others would be friendly.

"How does Jeanette know?" asked Mollie, bluntly.

"Oh, Jeanette ought to know," said

Nancy, "for the new little girl is her cousin, I mean her *third* cousin."

"Well, Nina is Jeanette's sister," said Mollie, "so what does *she* say?"

"She didn't say anything," said Nancy, "she just *looked*."

"Arabella Corryville is to be in our class," said Flossie, "and when I told Uncle Harry he laughed, and asked me if her Aunt Matilda was coming to school with her."

Of course they laughed, and it was Mollie who first spoke.

"Your Uncle Harry is always joking," she said, "and sometimes I can't tell whether he is in earnest, or only saying things just for fun."

"Well, I guess you'll laugh when I tell you what he said next! He said that although he had graduated from college, and

now was in business, he would urge Aunt Charlotte to let him attend a *few* sessions of our school, if Arabella's Aunt Matilda was to be there. He said it would be a great pleasure which he really could not miss."

How they laughed at the idea of Flossie's handsome young uncle in the little private school, while Arabella's prim little aunt was also a pupil.

"I asked him what he meant," said Flossie, who looked completely puzzled, "and he said that sometimes a man's wits needed sharpening, and that Aunt Matilda would be a regular file. Papa laughed, but mamma said: 'Harry, Harry, you really mustn't,' and he ran up to the music-room whistling 'O dear, what can the matter be?' I can't help laughing even when I don't understand his teasing jokes, he says

things in such a funny way, while his eyes just dance."

"He looked very handsome the day he wore his uniform, with the gold lace on it," said Dorothy; "don't you remember, Flossie? Your aunt was on the piazza, and she stooped and pinned a rose in his buttonhole. Do you think he knew how fine he looked, when he sprang into the saddle, and rode away?"

"I don't know," Flossie said, her blue eyes very thoughtful, "he never seems to think about it, and one thing I don't at all understand, he's big, and brave, and manly, yet he plays with me so gently, and he's as full of fun as a boy."

"That's why we all like him," said Nancy, "and he never acts as if we were just little girls, and so not worth noticing."

"Do you remember the day that the

tramp came into our kitchen, and frightened the cook? Uncle Harry was just strolling along the driveway. He walked into the kitchen, took the dirty tramp by the collar and marched him right out to the street," and Flossie's cheeks glowed with pride for her dear Uncle Harry.

" Yes, and a moment after, he saw little Reginald fall off his bicycle, and you ought to have seen how tenderly he picked him up, and brushed off the dust, and he was quite as gentle as mamma would have been."

" Oh, he's just fine," said Mollie, " and I *do* wish he would visit our school on a day when Arabella's aunt would be there! I love to see him when he looks at her. Someway he seems so very respectful, and yet his eyes laugh."

" Well, it's just a few days now before

school begins, and what fun we'll have," said Flossie, "and perhaps Arabella will invite her aunt to one of our entertainments; if she does, I'm just sure Uncle Harry would go."

"Oh, come here this minute, every one of you," called a cheery voice, and Nina Earl stepped through an opening in the hedge.

"Why, how surprised you look! I've been over to the stone cottage to call for you, Nancy, and Aunt Charlotte said that you were with Dorothy, so I ran across the lawn. I could hear you all talking, and I was wild to tell you something."

"Oh, tell it, tell it, Nina!" cried Mollie.

Nina looked back through the opening in the hedge.

"She's just saying 'good-morning' to Aunt Charlotte," she said, "and let me tell

you something; she's been all over the stone cottage, looking into this thing and peeping into that, till I'd think Aunt Charlotte would be wild. It's Arabella's aunt, and she says she came to learn if the house was a healthy one to be in, and to see if the plumbing was all right."

Dorothy's sweet eyes suddenly flashed.

"Doesn't she think my papa would keep Aunt Charlotte's house as comfortable as ours?" she said.

"Oh, 'tisn't that!" laughed Nina, "she said she felt obliged to find out if the cottage was a healthy place for a private school to be in, before she could say that Arabella might belong to the class! Did you ever hear anything like that?"

"Well, what makes her let Arabella come to our school?" queried blunt little Mol-

lie; "she could go to the public school. I guess we wouldn't mind."

"Mamma says we must be kind to Arabella," said Dorothy, "so I think we mustn't speak like that."

"I'll be kind to her when she comes," said Mollie, "because your mamma wishes it, but *now*, before school begins, I'm going to say that I just *wish* Arabella was going to the other school."

The others felt, as Mollie did, that the class would be quite as pleasant if Arabella attended the public school, but they did not like to say so.

The few days of waiting were past, and now the first day of school had come. The door of the pretty stone cottage stood wide open, as if assuring a welcome to the little pupils who would soon arrive, while the

sunlight streamed in across the hall, giving a cheery greeting.

On the rug sat Pompey, the cat, his fine coat sleek and glossy, and his white bosom as pure as much washing could make it. His paws were snugly tucked in, and he purred softly to himself as if he knew that it was nearly time for the pupils to arrive, and remembered that the little girls had been very fond of him.

In the cheery sitting-room, which was used as a schoolroom, sat Aunt Charlotte Grayson, looking over some books which lay upon the table.

Her soft gray gown and broad lace collar were most becoming, and she looked every inch the gentlewoman that she really was. She had once been Mrs. Dainty's governess, and now, as mistress of a thriving private school, she was independent

and happy. The class was not a large one, but the little pupils belonged to families who were well able to pay generously for fine instruction, and her home at the stone cottage was a loving gift from Mr. and Mrs. Dainty.

Mrs. Grayson had permitted Dorothy and Nancy to call her "Aunt Charlotte," and now it had become the loving title by which all her pupils addressed her.

She was eager to have her little class assemble, and, wondering if they were late, she looked at her watch.

"Quarter of nine," she said, and as if he understood what she had said, Pompey blinked up at the tall clock, yawned, and looked at the door.

The sound of merry voices made him prick up his ears. A moment more, and Dorothy and Nancy, Mollie and Flossie,

Nina and Jeanette Earl ran up the steps and in at the open door. Pompey received his usual number of love-pats, and then the girls, having hung their hats and coats in the hall, walked quietly in to greet Aunt Charlotte.

It was a fixed rule at the private school that there should never be any haste in reaching places in the schoolroom.

"It matters not that you are little girls, or that you are at school," Mrs. Grayson would say; "let me always have the pleasure of seeing you enter the class-room in as gentle a manner as you would enter a drawing-room," and her pupils took pleasure in doing as she wished.

The broad window-seats were banked with flowering plants, and as the children took their places they thought it the

brightest, cheeriest schoolroom in the world.

As if to show that he also had a place in Aunt Charlotte's class, Pompey ran across the floor and sprang up into a space on one window-seat between two large flower-pots, where he could enjoy a sun-bath.

Katie Dean, with her little Cousin Reginald, now entered, just in time to avoid being late.

"I thought you said your cousin was coming," whispered Mollie, but Aunt Charlotte had opened her Testament, and was commencing to read, so Nina only shook her head, and Mollie saw that she must wait until recess to know what Nina would say.

"'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,'" read Aunt Charlotte, and every girl looked

towards Flossie Barnet, who was always trying to say a pleasant word of an absent friend, or to coax two playmates, who had become estranged, to be fast friends again. Often they had heard her Uncle Harry say: "Flossie, you're a peacemaker." Her hands were clasped, and her blue eyes were full of interest in the verse which Aunt Charlotte was reading. Her red lips moved.

"'They shall be called the children of God,'" she whispered, and in her gentle little heart she determined to be, if possible, more kind and loving than ever before, toward her playmates.

Little Reginald had failed to understand the verse, and sat staring at Aunt Charlotte with round eyes. He was a handsome little fellow, with soft flaxen curls, and a smart, sturdy figure, and as he looked up into

Aunt Charlotte's face, he seemed like a pudgy cupid whom some one had dressed in a sailor suit.

Singing followed the reading, and all through the two merry songs which they sang, Reginald watched Aunt Charlotte, and wondered over the verse which she had read. When the arithmetic lesson was over, Aunt Charlotte asked if any one had a question to ask.

Katie Dean wished to hear an example explained, and when it had been made clear to her, Reginald held up his hand.

"What is your question?"

"What's 'peacemakers'?" he asked.

Aunt Charlotte explained the verse, and Reginald listened, but it was easy to see that he was disappointed.

"Do you understand now what the peacemakers are?" Aunt Charlotte asked.

"Yes'm," said Reginald, "but I wish I didn't."

"And why?" questioned Aunt Charlotte.

"'Cause I thought grandma was a peacemaker," Reginald said, "for she's *piecin'* a silk patchwork quilt, an' papa said she'd be *blessed* glad when it's done."

Aunt Charlotte was the only one who did not laugh, but the small boy was not at all vexed.

"*You* needn't laugh," he said to Katie, "for you've seen her makin' pieces out of silk, an' what's the difference between *makin' pieces* an' *peacemakin'?*"

CHAPTER II

ARABELLA AT SCHOOL

WHEN recess time came Mollie had forgotten to ask Nina if her cousin was to be a pupil, and it happened that neither of the others questioned her.

They were in the midst of a game of hide-and-seek, when Mollie, who, with Nina, was hiding behind a large rosebush, looked up just in time to see the garden gate open.

"Look!" she whispered.

"Why, that's Arabella!" said Nina, "but why has she brought her Aunt Matilda with her?"

"I guess she didn't," whispered Mol-

lie, "it's likely her Aunt Matilda's bringing *her*."

Nina stifled a laugh, and they saw the two go along the walk, and enter the cottage.

Flossie, who had been "it," ran quite around the house, and the others "ran in," Reginald loudly shouting, "All in, all in!"

Flossie returned, laughing gaily to think that they had all got in free. Then they commenced to talk of the new pupil, and quite forgot their game.

The schoolroom windows were open, and Aunt Matilda's shrill, piping voice could be plainly heard, but the children were not near enough to know what she was saying.

They saw her turn to go, and then, when she reached the door, she drew something from her bag, and placed it in Arabella's hand.

"What *do* you s'pose she's giving her?" whispered Nina.

"*Peppermints!*" said Mollie, but although she had whispered it, she felt that Dorothy had heard it, and knew that both she and Nina had been laughing at Arabella and her aunt. Mollie's cheeks flushed, and she looked down at her shoes. She knew that Dorothy's sweet eyes were looking at her, not angrily, but with a tender grieving.

Dorothy was full of fun, and ready for merriment at any time, but she saw nothing amusing in laughing at a playmate, or friend, and she had asked them all to be kind to Arabella.

Aunt Charlotte turned to the window, and set the little silver bell tinkling, and the pupils at once filed into the schoolroom.

They found Arabella Corryville sitting primly in her place. Her small, thin hands were clasped upon her desk, and she looked at the pupils as they filed in, peeping first over her glasses, and then through them, as if she were hunting for little faults which she really hoped to find.

Aunt Charlotte had told her that on this, her first day of school, she might listen to the recitations, and on the next day come with her lessons prepared, and then recite with the class.

She sat very still, only moving her round eyes to watch the pupils, and as she did not smile, one could not guess if she were pleased with the school or not.

The little girls busied themselves with their books, but Reginald kept his blue eyes fixed upon Arabella, as if he could think of nothing else.

At first she seemed not to notice him, but after a time she moved restlessly on her seat, and wriggled about in a way that delighted the small boy.

Arabella was not used to being stared at. She always stared boldly at other people, but here was some one who looked at her without so much as blinking. She glanced at the clock, and then, as if just remembering something, took a small bottle from her pocket, shook some pills into her hand, swallowed them, and turned to see if Reginald were looking. He was, and Arabella was provoked.

"What you staring at?" she whispered rudely.

"You!" he whispered, not a bit abashed.

"Well, you just *needn't*," said Arabella.

"I know *I needn't*," replied the small boy, "but I like to."

"Why?" she asked.

"'Cause you're funny," Reginald said.

It was not strange that Arabella was angry. Would any girl be pleased to have a small boy watching her, and declaring that she was "funny?"

And now Aunt Charlotte was calling the youngest class in reading, and Reginald hastily snatched his book, and began to hunt for the lesson.

"The third page, Reginald," said Aunt Charlotte; "you may read the first paragraph."

He found the place, and read the lines without a mistake. It was his first term at school, but his mother had found pleasure in teaching him, and he read quite as well as some of the younger pupils.

"Read the next paragraph, Reginald," said Aunt Charlotte.

"'When the king rode over the highway, the sun glistened upon his, — on his, — '"

It was a word which Reginald had never seen, and he frowned until an odd little pucker appeared on his forehead.

"'When the king rode over the highway, the sun glistened upon his,'" — again he paused. The word looked no easier this time than when he had first read the lines.

"I *can't* pronounce that word," he said.

"Read the lines again, and when you come to the word that puzzles you, pronounce it as you think it should be," said Aunt Charlotte.

The other pupils were interested, but when Reginald glanced toward Arabella, he saw that she was smiling in evident delight at his discomfiture. He resolved to

rush through the reading in a way that would tell her that he could read *anything.* He drew a long breath, and then, as fast as possible, he read:

"'When the king rode over the highway, the sun glistened upon his *carrot* wheels!'"

Even Aunt Charlotte smiled at the droll error, but Arabella laughed long and loud.

"Order, order!" said Aunt Charlotte.

"The word is *chariot*," she said.

The others read in turn, until they had finished the charming story, and each of the girls wondered why Arabella was not reproved for rudeness. The arithmetic lesson completed the morning's work, and as they walked home, they talked of the new pupil.

"I don't see why Aunt Charlotte didn't speak to Arabella," said Nina Earl, "she was horridly rude."

"And how queer she is," said Mollie Merton; "just the minute school was out she ran down the path, and across the street to get home before any of us could talk with her. And I *do* wonder Aunt Charlotte didn't speak to her about laughing so loudly, just because Reginald made a mistake. I don't believe she could read any better."

"I guess *perhaps* Arabella didn't mean to be disagreeable," said Flossie Barnet.

She disliked Arabella, but she never could bear to hear any one spoken of unkindly.

"Now, Flossie Barnet, you might just know that Arabella *likes* to be unpleasant," said Jeanette, and Flossie could not deny it.

Dorothy and Nancy had heard what they were saying, and they thought that it was

not at all nice of the girls to speak as if Aunt Charlotte had allowed Arabella to be rude.

"Perhaps Aunt Charlotte thought she wouldn't correct her the very first day," Nancy said, and Nina and Mollie wished that what they had said had not been heard.

Little Reginald seemed, for once, to have nothing to say.

He was skipping along between his cousin Katie Dean and Jeanette Earl, and tightly grasping their hands.

There had been a light shower early in the morning, and here and there a little puddle reflected the blue sky and floating clouds. Reginald saw one just ahead, and laughed softly. Katie and Jeanette were talking with Dorothy, and paying little

heed to the small boy who walked between them.

"I thought your cousin was coming to school this morning," said Dorothy.

"She's coming the first of next week," said Jeanette.

"And what is her name?" asked Katie.

They were close to a fine large puddle now, and Reginald with a hop landed both feet in the middle of it.

"Why, Reginald Merton Dean! You naughty boy!" said Katie; "just *look* at my new shoes! See the dirty water you've splashed on Jeanette's dress!"

"And look at the puddle," exclaimed Reginald, "I didn't spoil the puddle; it looks just same's it did before I jumped in it."

Katie forgot that her question had not been answered, but Jeanette remembered it.

"You asked what my cousin's name is," said Jeanette; "her name is Lola Blessington."

"Is she a peacemaker?" asked Reginald, who still remembered the morning's verse.

"Well, — no, I mean not *exactly*," said Nina, who hastened to reply before Jeanette could do so.

"What's she like?" asked Reginald.

"Oh, you'll know when you see her," said Jeanette.

"And we shall see her next week," Katie said.

The sunny days slipped by, and nothing unusual happened at the little school.

In that first week the other pupils learned that there was but one way to get on peaceably with Arabella.

At first they followed Dorothy's exam-

ple, and urged Arabella to join them in their games, but games which they chose never pleased her, and when Friday came, Reginald spoke his mind. They were walking home from school, and Arabella, as usual, had turned from her playmates, preferring to go home alone.

Reginald looked after her frowning.

"She's just an old *fussbudget!*" he said.

"Oh, hush!" said Katie, "don't you know that we all promised Dorothy we'd be kind to Arabella?"

"Well, I didn't say it *to* her," said Reginald, "but I'd like to."

"Now, Reginald," said Katie, "you know mamma said that you were always to be a gentleman, and that you must be 'specially polite and gentle if you were to be in a class of girls."

"Well, what did I *do?*" he asked with wide open eyes. "I haven't touched Arabella; if she'd been a boy I would have shaken her this morning, when she sneered and called me a pretty boy. Boys aren't ever pretty; only girls are pretty, and any boy would hate Arabella for saying it."

They tried not to laugh, but the handsome little fellow was so angry, and all because Arabella had called him pretty. Reginald, who never could be angry long, joined in the general laugh which could not be controlled.

Early Monday morning Dorothy and Nancy were skipping along the avenue on their way to school.

Every day of the first week had been sunny, and here was Monday with the bright blue sky overhead, and the little sunbeams dancing on the road.

"We had every lesson perfect last week," said Dorothy, "and I mean to get 'perfect' this week, too."

"So do I," said Nancy, "and I can, if Arabella doesn't make me do half her examples!"

"I don't think she ought to," Dorothy said.

"She doesn't *really* ask me to," said Nancy, "but it's almost the same. She says she can't do them, and says she could if some one was kind enough to just show her how. Then I can't seem to be unkind, and the minute I say I'll *help* her, she pushes her slate and pencil towards me. 'You can do 'em easier than I can,' she says, and instead of *helping* her, I do them all."

"Does Aunt Charlotte like to have you?" asked Dorothy.

"I don't know; I haven't told her about it yet. I don't want to be a telltale," Nancy said.

"Of course you don't," agreed Dorothy, "but you know Aunt Charlotte says that we are to be independent, and Arabella's anything but independent when she doesn't do her examples herself. It's puzzling, though; mamma says we mustn't notice her queer ways, and that we must be kind to her, and it doesn't seem kind to refuse to help her with her lessons."

"Wait for us!" called a merry voice, and turning, they saw Nina and Jeanette running toward them. A third girl clasped their hands, and Dorothy knew that she must be their cousin, Lola Blessington.

She was very pretty, and she seemed so friendly that Dorothy was really glad that

she was to join the class, and Nancy was quite as pleased. It was early for school, and Nina proposed that they sit on the wall, and wait for Katie and Reginald.

They seated themselves upon the stone wall, and like a row of sparrows, they chattered gaily.

Lola seemed full of fun, and she told of some fine games which she had played at the school where she had been a pupil, and they were all very glad that she was to be a member of the private class.

And now a thin little figure made its way across the street, just a little way from where they were sitting.

Nina reached behind Lola, and touched her sister's sleeve; Jeanette nodded, and looked toward the girl who walked along, looking down upon the ground.

Dorothy saw her, and called to her kindly:

"Arabella! Arabella! Won't you come and meet our new playmate?"

Arabella turned, paused just a second to stare at the new pupil. Then turning toward the stone cottage, she said:

"I can't stop to talk; I've got to go to school."

"Why, how —" Nancy would not finish the sentence.

She was grieved that Arabella should be so rude to Dorothy, and vexed that their new friend should be unkindly treated.

"Who is she?" Lola asked.

"She's Arabella Corryville," said Nina, "and she's in our class, and I wish —" she stopped as short as Nancy had a few moments before.

Lola turned to look at Nina.

"What were you going to say?" she whispered.

"I was going to say that I wished she wasn't."

CHAPTER III

THE DIALOGUE

LOLA received a cordial greeting from Aunt Charlotte, and at recess time she declared that she was now in the nicest school that she had ever attended.

"Why, how many have you been in?" asked Mollie; "this is the only one I've ever been to, and you aren't any older than I am."

Lola laughed.

"I've been in three schools," she said. "Last year I commenced in one school, but we moved, and I had to go to another one. This makes the third, and I know I shall like it best of all."

Every one liked Lola. She seemed to be tireless. She knew many games, and as soon as they wearied of one, she chose another.

"She's as much fun to play with as a boy," said Reginald, at which Arabella laughed.

"You like *any* girls better'n boys; you said so the other day," she said.

"I like *some* girls," said the small boy, and he might have said more, but his cousin Katie stood behind Arabella, shaking her head, and frowning at him. Reginald looked at Katie, and decided to be silent.

There were ever so many things which he would have liked to say, but Katie *might* tell at home if he were too naughty.

When Arabella found that Lola was liked by all the other pupils, she decided

to be just a bit friendly toward her, and Lola seemed pleased that Arabella was no longer odd and silent.

And so it happened that Arabella now seemed really to be a member of the class.

She no longer refused to join in their games at recess, and took more interest in her lessons than she had before.

Aunt Charlotte was delighted, and hoped that Arabella's pleasant mood would last.

There was great excitement one morning when the little class was told that plans had been made for the first entertainment, and that rehearsals would commence that afternoon. A little murmur of delight passed over the class, and Aunt Charlotte smiled at their pleasure.

"I shall ask Dorothy to sing two songs for us; Nancy, I know, will be willing to do a fancy dance; Nina and Jeanette are learn-

ing a new duet for the piano, and I should be pleased to have that for another number on our programme. I have chosen a fine dialogue which will give a part to every girl, and also a boy's rôle for Reginald."

When Aunt Charlotte had finished speaking, there was another little murmur of delight, and then the lessons for the day commenced.

At recess they could not spare a moment for games! They talked, and talked of the entertainment which they were to give, and of the fine times which they would have at the afternoon rehearsals, and after school, when they walked along the avenue, they still were talking of the solo numbers, and of the dialogue.

"There's eight girls in it, and one boy, that's Reginald," said Mollie, "and I know — oh, wait till I tie my shoe,"

She rested her foot on a stone, and tied the ribbons with a smart little twitch.

"And now what were you going to say?" asked Jeanette.

"I *said* how many were to be in the dialogue, and I was *going* to say that I know I'm just wild to hear Aunt Charlotte read it to us this afternoon."

"Then you won't have to be wild long," Jeanette said, "for we are to come back at two to have our parts given to us."

At two o'clock they were again at the cottage, eagerly watching Aunt Charlotte, as she opened her desk, and took from it a book with a scarlet cover.

"There are nine girls in my class, just the number required for this dialogue," she said. "Eight of the characters are school

girls, one is a fairy, and the boy in the little play is an elfin messenger."

"That'll be *me*, for I'm the only boy here," said Reginald; "you girls don't know *who'll* be *which!*"

Aunt Charlotte laughed at this speech as heartily as did the girls.

"We'll soon know who'll be which," said Nancy.

"Yes, because Aunt Charlotte will tell us," laughed Dorothy.

"The directions for producing the play, speaks of the fairy queen as being taller than the school girls, so I will give that part to you, Jeanette, as you are a trifle taller than the others."

"Oh, I'll love to be the queen," Jeanette said quickly, and she glanced at her playmates with flashing eyes.

"I guess Dorothy expected to be the

queen," whispered Nina to Lola. Nina felt *almost* as proud as if she herself had been honored.

It was true that Dorothy had usually been given leading parts, but evidently she was not at all vexed.

"You'll make a fine queen, Jeanette," she was saying, "and oh, Aunt Charlotte, do tell her to let her hair hang loose; it's 'most below her waist."

"Surely Jeanette must have her hair unbraided," Aunt Charlotte agreed, "and we must make a tiny gold crown for her."

"How lovely!" said Nancy, and Jeanette was delighted.

Of course Reginald was to be the little page, and the other parts were assigned, Aunt Charlotte choosing for each of the girls the part which best fitted her.

At first Arabella had seemed greatly in-

terested, but as soon as Jeanette had been chosen for the fairy queen, she left the group, and turning toward the window, looked out into the garden.

Flossie called to her.

"Come, Arabella!" she cried. "We're going to read our dialogue now."

The others took their places, and Arabella turned, and slowly joined them.

"We will pass the book from one to another, and thus read the little play through," said Aunt Charlotte, "and I will copy each part carefully, that each can memorize all that she has to say. When you have learned your lines, we will have our first rehearsal."

"Hooray!" said Reginald, and although the girls laughed, they were quite as eagerly delighted as he.

They left the cottage, and as they walked

down the avenue they talked of the pretty dialogue, each insisting that she liked her part best.

"But mine's the best," said Reginald, "for I'm the only boy in it."

"Mine's the best, for I'm the queen," said Jeanette, and she held her head very high, as she looked toward her playmates.

"*All* the parts are nice," Nancy said, "and we'll have a fine entertainment."

Arabella had stopped to arrange her books in her desk, and was the last to leave the cottage.

"I like to see that you are orderly," Aunt Charlotte said, as Arabella passed her on her way to the door.

She made no reply, but hurried down the walk.

"An odd child, truly," Aunt Charlotte

said, as she looked after the slender little figure.

The next day each girl received a copy of her lines, and Wednesday of the next week was set for the first rehearsal.

"I know every word I have to say," said Jeanette, as she walked along toward the cottage with Katie Dean.

It was Wednesday morning, and the first rehearsal was set for the afternoon.

"I *guess* I know mine, but I'm not sure. Aunt Charlotte will have the book and she can prompt me," Katie said.

"I know mine," boasted Reginald; "I have to run in right after the fairy, and say, 'Here is your magic wand, oh, queen.'"

"I guess you can't say it *that* way," laughed Jeanette, "for Aunt Charlotte

wouldn't let you. You said it just as if you'd said, 'Here is a great, big sandwich, oh, queen!'"

"Well, I *didn't* say that, and you needn't laugh. It makes you feel big to be queen!"

"*Reginald!*"

"Well, it does," declared the small boy, "an' Arabella said so yesterday."

"Arabella likes to say mean things," said Jeanette, "but it doesn't prove that they're so because she says so."

Everything went smoothly at the afternoon rehearsal, until Dorothy said that Nancy was to do a lovely fancy dance for one number on the programme, when Arabella felt moved to make one of her unpleasant remarks.

"My Aunt Matilda doesn't 'prove of dancing," she said, looking sharply at Nancy.

"Well, your Aunt Matilda doesn't *have* to dance," said Mollie, pertly.

Mollie knew that she was naughty, but truly Arabella was trying.

"Perhaps your aunt likes music," said Nina; "Dorothy is going to sing."

"I don't know whether she likes singing or not," Arabella replied, "but she doesn't like dancing, I know, for she said she wouldn't ever let me learn to dance."

"P'r'aps your father'd let you learn," said Reginald.

"He wouldn't unless Aunt Matilda said I could."

"Why *does* folks have Aunt Matildas?" muttered Reginald.

Mollie Merton laughed. She had heard what he said, although he had spoken almost in a whisper.

They left the cottage, promising to study

their parts very carefully, and as they walked down the avenue they repeated some of the pleasing lines which they remembered.

Suddenly Reginald spoke.

"I've got to go back; I've left my ball on my desk," he said.

"Don't go back," Katie said, "you won't want it to-night."

"P'raps I will, and anyway I'm going after it," said Reginald, stoutly; "you wait for me."

"Oh, we can't, Reginald," Katie said, "but you can overtake us if you hurry."

Reginald was already running toward the cottage, so he did not hear what Katie said. He pushed open the little gate and ran in, and up the steps on to the piazza.

"I left my ball on my desk," he said to

Aunt Charlotte, who was standing in the hall.

"The schoolroom is open," she said with a smile, and Reginald rushed past her, and hurried to his desk. The ball was not on it, nor was it in the desk, as careful hunting proved.

"I left it right on top of my desk," he declared to Aunt Charlotte, who had followed, and now stood beside him.

"Are you quite sure of that?" she asked gently.

"Oh, yes, I *know* I left it there, and I came back on purpose to get it," he said, his blue eyes wide with surprise, "and now it is getting late to hunt for it, 'sides, I don't know where to hunt."

His lip quivered, and there was something very like tears in his eyes, although he blinked very hard to hide them.

"I will search for the ball, and keep it for you to-morrow morning," Aunt Charlotte said; "it may have dropped to the floor, and rolled away into some shadowy corner, or behind the draperies. It is almost twilight now, but the lamplight to-night or the bright daylight to-morrow will help me to find it for you."

Thus comforted, Reginald left the cottage, but although he ran nearly all the way home, he saw neither of his schoolmates. He had hunted so long for the coveted ball that they had reached their homes before he was even in sight.

"We can't wait for him," Katie had said, as she looked down the road to see if he were coming, and then they had become so interested in talking of their dialogue that they forgot all about him.

Usually Reginald called for his cousin Katie, but the next morning he was so eager to learn if his ball had been found, that he started early, intending to be the first at school, and hurried past Katie's house lest she might call to him to wait.

He had almost reached the cottage when he remembered that he had left both his spelling-book and reader at home.

It was really provoking, and for just a moment he paused, wondering if he might borrow books, or if indeed he ought to return for his own.

It was only a few days before that Aunt Charlotte had spoken of promptness at school, and at the same time said that only a careless pupil would be obliged to borrow.

He would not be the first to be thought careless; he would run back to the house, but he must hurry, or be late.

There was a field that he could cross, and thus save a little time, he thought, but when half-way across it he found that he was losing, instead of gaining time. The uneven ground and coarse grass were much harder to run over than the fine, hard surface of the avenue, and in his haste he stumbled along over sticks and rough places, reaching the house flushed and tired.

He found his books just where he had left them and hurried past the maid, who was surprised to see him.

"Why, Master Reginald, I thought I see yer go out to school some time ago," she said.

"I had to come back after my books," he replied, looking over his shoulder as he ran down the walk.

"I won't go across that little old field,"

he said in disgust. "It must have taken twice as long to go that way."

So he ran along the avenue, and soon neared the bend of the road where, between trees and shrubbery, he could see a bit of the cottage.

"I'll be the only one that's late," he thought, when at that moment he noticed some one farther along the avenue.

It was Arabella Corryville, but what was she doing?

He drew back, and stood behind a bush which overhung the sidewalk and partly hid him.

Arabella was looking over the low wall, — ah, now she was reaching down as if trying to get something that was hard to reach, or was she dropping something over?

Reginald could not guess which she was

She was reaching down as if to get something. — *Page 58.*

doing, and he knew that if he asked her, she would not tell him.

Now Arabella was running; Reginald ran, too. He knew that he must be quite late, for none of the other pupils were in sight.

He was a swift runner, and he entered the door just as Arabella was about to close it.

"You're late, too," she whispered.

The little pupils were singing, and the two went softly to their seats.

After the singing, Aunt Charlotte questioned Reginald.

"I started early, but I forgot my books, and going back for them made me late. I ran 'most all the way; I meant to be here early."

"Being late for such a reason as that is excusable," said Aunt Charlotte.

"You, also, were late, Arabella."

"I had to help my Aunt Matilda," said Arabella, as glibly as if it had been true.

"Oh, oo! That's a fib!" whispered Reginald, but Arabella did not hear him.

Aunt Charlotte said nothing, but she thought it strange that Arabella's aunt should have detained her. Surely the maid could have given all necessary assistance, rather than force the little daughter of the house to be late at school.

Reginald had longed to peep over that wall, but he dared not linger. What had Arabella been doing? He determined to wait until he had a fine chance, and then he would look over that wall. He believed that she had hidden something there. He would not tell the other girls, for they might tell Arabella.

At recess time he asked Aunt Charlotte if she had found his ball.

No, the ball was not in the room.

"I think you must have been mistaken," she said, "the ball must be at your home."

"Truly I had it here," the boy insisted, "I left it on my desk."

"It must have gone to find my red book which had our dialogue in it, for that has disappeared, and hunt as I will, I cannot find it. You have your parts carefully copied, and can be learning them, but I need the book to prompt you."

CHAPTER IV

AN ENTERTAINMENT

REGINALD knew that the ball had been on his desk when he had left the schoolroom, and he could not think how it could have disappeared unless some one had helped it to do so.

Again he searched in his desk, but the ball was not there. He put away the books which he had taken out, and closed his desk, looking up just in time to see that Arabella was closely watching him. How queer she looked! She was not laughing, but she seemed to be amused.

"I b'lieve I know where my ball is," he whispered; "I just know Arabella took it,

and p'r'aps that was what she dropped over the wall."

"What are you saying?" whispered Arabella, but Reginald only shook his head.

"I guess I won't tell her," he thought, "but right after school I'll look."

When school was out he lingered, hoping that the girls would hurry off, and thus leave him free to search behind the wall where he believed Arabella had hidden his ball.

It was useless to wait. The girls sat upon the wall talking until Reginald was out of patience, and when at last they started for home, Katie insisted that he must go with her.

"You know mamma said that we were to hurry home from school," she said.

"You weren't hurrying when you were sitting on this wall," said Reginald.

"But I forgot, so I'm hurrying now," Katie replied, and grasping his hand, she commenced to run very fast, laughing because he looked so unwilling.

That night there was a heavy shower that drenched the trees and left clear little puddles in the road.

Reginald reached the cottage just in time to avoid being late.

The lessons went smoothly until the readers were opened. It was a charming story, but there were many long words which puzzled the pupils.

"The water nymphs paused in the moonlight to watch the fountain spray," was the opening sentence of the paragraph which Reginald was to read, but the letters were spaced so that the s and p were not

close together in "spray." Reginald read it as it appeared:

"'The water nymphs paused in the moonlight to watch the fountains pray.'"

"Why, how could they?" he asked, "how could fountains *pray?*"

The class was amused, but Arabella laughed long and loudly, and Aunt Charlotte was obliged to speak forcibly to her to check her merriment. The small boy was angry.

"I'll get even with her; see 'f I don't," he thought.

Indeed he could hardly wait to punish Arabella for her rudeness.

"May I leave the yard?" he asked at recess time, "I've thought of one place I'd like to hunt for my ball."

He was off like a flash, and the girls returned to their game.

"It's your turn, Dorothy," Nancy said, and Dorothy entered the ring.

"From this ring that has no end
You may choose a little friend,"

sang the merry voices, and Dorothy looked from one to another. She would have liked to choose Nancy, but she thought how few of the girls *ever* chose Arabella, and she held out her hand to the playmate who seldom was favored.

If Arabella was pleased she did not show it. She took her place in the ring, however, and looked at the merry faces that circled around her.

"You are next the favored guest,
Choose the friend you love the best."

"Choose?" How *could* she choose? She never liked to do a pleasant thing for any one, and whomever she called into the ring would feel favored.

"Hurry, and choose some one, Arabella," called Mollie Merton, but still Arabella stood sullenly staring at her shoes.

Mollie was ready again to urge Arabella to choose, when the gate flew open, and Reginald, breathless and excited, rushed in. Aunt Charlotte was standing in the walk, watching the pretty game. Reginald ran to her, holding out something very wet and dripping.

"I didn't find my ball, but I guess this is the di'logue book you couldn't find," he said.

The red and gold cover was blistered, and its fine color had almost disappeared.

Aunt Charlotte looked her surprise.

"Where did you find it?" she asked.

"Down behind the wall, where I saw somebody drop it," he said, looking sharply at Arabella.

Of course they all looked at Arabella, who hesitated for a moment, then pushing past the girls, she ran down the walk to the gate, looking over her shoulder to call to Aunt Charlotte:

"I've got to go home, 'cause my head aches."

"I wonder what Aunt Charlotte will do about the book?" whispered Mollie.

"Why, what *could* she do?" Flossie asked in surprise.

"Why, Flossie Barnet! You saw the cover all spoiled. Don't you s'pose she'll — "

But Mollie's question was hushed by the silvery tinkle of the bell which told that recess was over.

Arabella did not return for the afternoon rehearsal, but she entered the class-room on the next morning as calmly as if nothing

had happened, and she seemed very eager to show her interest in the dialogue by appearing at all the other rehearsals.

Exhibition day had arrived, and parents and friends were seated before the tiny stage, waiting for the curtain to rise.

Dorothy had sung two songs very sweetly, Nancy had danced for them, and had charmed them with her grace, Nina and Jeanette had played a duet, and now, yes, the curtain was rising!

Every one leaned forward to catch the first glimpse of the stage-setting, and in the midst of the excitement, a small, prim figure entered the room, and made its way toward the only seat which was still unoccupied. It was beside Flossie's Uncle Harry, and as the woman took the seat he

turned, and then moved to make extra room for her.

"That *must* be Arabella's Aunt Matilda!" he whispered to his wife.

"Hush-sh-sh!" she whispered.

"It not only *must* be, but it *is!*" he declared, and he offered her his programme.

Aunt Matilda was not wholly pleased with his courtesy, and had half a mind to refuse it, but few could resist his winning smile, and reluctantly she kept it.

"Aunt Matilda looks as if she were angry because she is not included in the dialogue," whispered Uncle Harry, to which his lovely young wife replied:

"She'll hear you, if you aren't careful; now *do* give your attention to the stage."

"I'm simply *all* ears," he whispered, and at that moment, the children ran on, entering from either side.

The pretty scene represented a little grove, in which the school girls had gathered to summon the queen of the fairies, who might grant the dearest wish of each.

The first fairy to appear was Green Feather, an elfin page or messenger, and Reginald made a perfect sprite, in his green suit, and cap with a long, green quill.

He took the message which the girls wished to send to the queen, and then hurried away to summon her, while the school girls chanted a magic verse which should aid her to appear quickly.

"Fairy queen, we wait for thee,
Willing subjects we will be.
Come! Thou'lt find us at thy feet,
We would beg, ay, and entreat
That our wishes thou wilt hear,
When thou dost indeed appear.
Now we draw a magic ring,
'Come, fair queen,' we gaily sing."

With a silver-tipped wand they drew a circle upon the ground, and scarcely was it finished when Jeanette ran out from between the mimic trees, and sprang into the circle, a dazzling figure, all white and silver, and blue. Upon her long, dark hair rested a tiny gold crown, and in her hand she carried a gold wand which was wound with strings of pearls.

"Thou, with voice so silvery clear,
I your dearest wish will hear."

As Jeanette spoke the lines she held her wand above Dorothy's head.

"Song! Ah, let me always sing
For the peasant, or the king,
For the ones I hold most dear,
For all hearts that I may cheer,"

sang Dorothy, in her clear, light little treble, and very winning she looked, as she

extended her hand toward the fairy whom she implored to grant her wish.

> "Sing you shall, in tones so clear
> That the very birds shall hear,
> And, in envy, cease their lay
> While your melody holds sway."

As Jeanette chanted the verse, she waved her wand, and Dorothy, entering the circle beside her, sang a fairy song which delighted all who listened.

The woman beside Uncle Harry seemed ill at ease, crumpling her programme, and moving restlessly upon her seat as if the little play bored her.

Uncle Harry stooped, and picked up the fan which had dropped from her lap. She looked at him as if she thought that he had intended to steal it, then, relenting, she screwed her thin lips into something like a smile.

"Thank ye," she said, as she took the fan, and glanced at his pleasant face.

Uncle Harry wished that she would speak again.

"I wish she'd give us some of her '*views*,'" he whispered to his wife, "Arabella says she has plenty of them."

"Oh, Harry, hush, unless you want her to hear you."

"I wouldn't mind," he whispered, his blue eyes twinkling with merriment.

Just at that moment, the fairy queen seated herself upon her woodland throne, and as the girls knelt before her, the red curtain rolled slowly down, hiding the little stage.

The first act was finished, and now, in the few moments before the curtain would rise, the buzz of voices whispered approval of the pretty play.

Arabella's prim little aunt looked furtively toward her neighbor. He smiled encouragingly, and she ventured to speak.

She was a little old lady and he was tall and stalwart; his handsome face was youthful, and she wished him to know that she thought him a mere boy.

"Young man, do you approve of this play-acting?" she asked.

"Oh, surely," he replied. "Who would care to see professionals, if he might, instead, see children *trying* to act?"

She eyed him sharply to learn if he were joking, but his manner was so dignified that she did not dream that he was amused.

"Well, I think if we had these exhibitions often the children would grow to be just too pert for anything. I have my views about play-acting, and as my niece is a pupil here, I'm just a little anxious

about how this school is run. Have you any small sisters here?" she asked.

His eyes were dancing.

"I've no small sisters," he said, "and as my little daughter is but nine months old, I've not yet sent her to school."

"Your daughter? Well, I declare! Why, I thought you were an overgrown boy!" she said, bluntly.

"Alas! That's what my wife frequently calls me," he said, and from his manner one might have thought that he deeply regretted the fact.

"If your wife is here, young man, I should think she'd see you talking to that pretty girl beside you," said the little woman, sharply.

"Oh, she rather likes it," he said, with a soft laugh, "you see that pretty girl is my wife." Aunt Matilda stared.

"Wouldn't you like to meet her?" he asked; "this is such a very informal gathering that I might venture to present her, if only I knew your name."

"I'm Arabella Corryville's aunt," she said, without realizing that that was not telling her name.

"Vera," he said, "allow me to present you to Arabella's aunt; madam, this is my wife!"

The ladies bowed, and the younger woman spoke very cordially, then the curtain went up and every eye turned toward the stage.

It was in the last act that Arabella entered from the right, and all were surprised when in a clear voice, and with appropriate gestures, she spoke her lines, making quite as good an impression as any of her schoolmates.

During the early part of the dialogue Arabella had not been on the little stage, and her doting aunt felt injured, because she believed that the other children had been given the most important parts. She had expressed her disapproval of "play-acting" to Uncle Harry.

Now all was different; Arabella had appeared, had spoken well, and the applause which she received completely changed Aunt Matilda's mind.

"Granted our wishes,
Happy hearts have we;
True to our fairy queen
Ever we'll be,"

sang the children, and then once more the red curtain hid the tiny stage.

"On second thoughts, I guess play-acting is rather a fine thing if it's well done," Aunt Matilda said, "an' I guess my Ara-

bella did 'bout as well as any of 'em. I shouldn't wonder if she could be a great actress if she chose. Not that I'd want her to be one; no *indeed*, but it's pleasant to think that she could."

"Oh, certainly," said Uncle Harry. "It would be most delightful if we could be *sure* that, at ten minutes' notice, Arabella could become the world's greatest actress; that by gently beckoning to him, the most obdurate theatrical manager would bow abjectly before her."

"Well, I guess so," the prim little woman said, not quite understanding his meaning, but thinking the speech, as a whole, rather grand.

The little entertainment had been a success, and Aunt Charlotte received very warm congratulations for the fine work which her little pupils had done.

As they strolled homeward, the guests talked of the numbers which had most delighted them.

Uncle Harry, wag that he was, had found Aunt Matilda quite as amusing as the music, the pretty dance which Nancy had contributed, or the fairy dialogue. He was expecting every moment that his young wife would gently upbraid him for his raillery, and he had not long to wait. As they turned in at their own gateway, she looked up at him.

"Harry," she said, "you have a merry heart, and I would not for the world have you more quiet, but sometimes you carry your jokes too far. Dear, will you tell me why you did not mention that strange woman's name? You introduced her as Arabella's aunt."

"My dear, that's who she said she was;

she didn't tell me her name, so how could I tell you?"

"But you did not tell her *my* name; you introduced me as your wife."

"Well, surely you *are* my wife; as she omitted to state what *her* name was, I wouldn't tell her *yours*. Simply evening things up, that's all."

"What an idea!" she said, but she could not help laughing at his little joke.

CHAPTER V

THE RETURN OF PATRICIA

OF course they talked and talked of their entertainment, of their fine audience, of the applause, and the delight of their friends.

They were on their way to school one morning, Nina, Jeanette, and their cousin, Lola Blessington.

"Nancy Ferris danced just *beautifully*," said Lola, "I wonder where she learned."

"I don't know," Jeanette said, sullenly.

She had envied the applause which Nancy's graceful dancing had evoked.

"Why, Jeanette," exclaimed Nina, "you *do* know that Nancy learned to dance in New York."

"Well, I don't know *who* taught her, and that's probably what Lola meant," Jeanette retorted sharply.

"New York!" said Lola. "Why, I remember a little girl I saw once at the theatre, who danced so gracefully that I thought she must be a fairy. She seemed ever so much like Nancy, but she had — "

"Come here, Nancy," called Jeanette, sharply, "Lola says she saw a girl once, at a theatre in New York, who danced and looked like you. What do you think of that?"

"*Jeanette!*" cried Nina, surprised that her sister should be so eager to tease Nancy, but Nancy did not seem annoyed.

She looked straight into Jeanette's flashing eyes, as she said, quietly:

"Perhaps Lola did see me dance; I was in New York."

"Oh, I didn't say it was you who danced at the theatre. I said the little girl was like you, but I remember now her hair was yellow," Lola said.

"I wore a wig of long yellow curls," Nancy said, "and I had to dance whether I wished to or not; Uncle Steve made me. Oh, I was not happy there. I was never so happy as when I've been with dear Aunt Charlotte, and Dorothy. Let's talk about something else."

Jeanette felt a bit ashamed. Nina wished that her sister had not been so rude, and for a few moments neither could think of anything to say, but just at that moment Dorothy joined them, and soon they were talking as gaily as before.

Then Katie and Reginald came hurrying along the avenue, and a moment later Mollie Merton and Flossie Barnet, and

soon they were all chattering like a flock of sparrows.

"Say! Just listen to me a minute," shouted Reginald, "I've got something great to tell you, but I can't until you'll hark."

"What is it? What is it?" cried the eager voices.

"It's just this," he said with much importance: "My mamma called on Aunt Charlotte yesterday, and while they were talking 'bout our school Aunt Charlotte said that the big girls would begin to study history this week, and my brother Bob says it'll be all 'bout cutting folks' heads off. I guess it'll scare girls to study that. 'Twould scare me, and *I'm* a boy!"

"Why, Reginald Dean!" cried Katie.

"My middle name's Merton," said the small boy, coolly.

"Well, Reginald Merton Dean, then," Katie said, "and whatever your name is, you ought not to tell things like that!"

"Like what? Like learning 'bout folks choppin' off other folks' heads? Well, I guess it's so if my big brother says so," Reginald replied.

The girls did not believe it, but they could not deny it. They knew that Reginald *thought* what he said was true, but they believed that, in some way, the facts had become twisted.

They were at the cottage door now, and as they entered Reginald whispered:

"You just see, Katie Dean! I tell you Bob knows!"

The early morning lessons were the same as usual, and the girls soon forgot what Reginald had said, and at recess there were

so many games to be played that there was little time for talking.

It was after recess that the surprise came. The reading lesson had been unusually interesting, and instead of twenty minutes, it had occupied a half-hour.

When the readers were put aside, Aunt Charlotte said:

"Commencing to-morrow, we shall devote a half-hour to studying history. You are all much younger than the pupils in the public schools who begin to study history, but we shall take it up in an easy, enjoyable way. I shall read to you from a finely written volume which I own, while you will try to write, from memory, what I have read."

"What did I tell you?" whispered Reginald. "*Now* I guess you'll hear 'bout folks with their heads off!"

Katie put her hands over her ears, but Reginald's eyes were twinkling with delight. The girls would have to admit that his scrap of news was true!

As they hastened down the long avenue after school, he again asked his question:

"Say, girls! What did I say?"

"You said we'd got to learn horrid things, and Aunt Charlotte didn't say so," said Mollie.

"I know she didn't, but Bob did, and you wait," was the quick reply.

"*I'll* tell you something that you'd hardly believe, but it's *true*," said Mollie; "it's somebody that's coming right here to Merrivale to live."

"Is it somebody you know?" Dorothy asked.

Mollie laughed.

"Somebody we *all* know," she said.

"Is she nice? Do we like her?" Nina questioned.

"I'll tell you who it is, and then you'll know whether you're glad or not," said Mollie.

She had been walking backward, and in front of her playmates, and thus she could watch their faces. She looked at them an instant, then she said:

"It's — *Patricia Lavine!*"

The little group stood stock still, and it was quite evident that not one of the party was delighted.

Nancy was the first to speak.

"Are you *sure*, Mollie?" she asked.

"She said so," Mollie replied. "I was running across the lawn to call for Flossie, when I heard some one call:

"'Mollie! Mollie! Mollie Merton!'

"I turned, and there was Patricia run-

ning up the walk. You know she was always in a rush, and she's just the same now.

"'I can't stop but a minute,' she said, 'but I've just time to tell you that we've been hunting houses, and we're coming here to live. We've got a house right next to the big schoolhouse, and that's nice, for I wouldn't want to go to private school.'

"Then she ran off, just looking over her shoulder to say:

"'I've got to hurry, for I've an engagement, but I'll be over to see you all soon.'"

"I wish she *wouldn't*," said Reginald, stoutly.

"Perhaps she's pleasanter than when she lived here before," ventured Flossie, looking up into the faces of her playmates.

Dear little girl, the youngest of the

group, she was ever ready to say a kind word for an absent playmate.

"She *looked* just the same," said Mollie.

"If she said she was to live next to the big schoolhouse, that is just *miles* from here," Jeanette said, "so she wouldn't be likely to come over here very often."

"'Tisn't any farther than where she lived before," said Nina, "and she came often enough then."

Aunt Charlotte had chosen wisely, when she had decided to interest her young pupils in history, by reading aloud from a volume in which the facts were set forth in story form, and there was one pupil who listened more intently than any of the others.

One glance at Reginald's earnest little

face would have convinced any one that he was wildly interested.

His round, blue eyes never left Aunt Charlotte's face while she was reading. The story of Ponce de Leon's search for the fountain of youth was more exciting than any fairy tale that he had ever heard. He saw no pathos in the old Spaniard's useless search. The picture which the history painted for him showed only the little band of swarthy men following their handsome, white-haired leader through the wild, unexplored South, their picturesque, gaily colored costumes gleaming in the sunlight.

How brilliant the pageant! How brave, how valiant they must have appeared! Even the gorgeous wild flowers paled with chagrin as the bold, venturesome Spaniards trampled them underfoot as they

marched steadily onward, hoping yet to find the crystal fountain which should grant to them eternal youth.

When Aunt Charlotte ceased reading, she said:

"Now, take your pencils, and write all that you remember of what I have read."

How their pencils flew! In a short time their papers were ready, and the little pupils proved that they had been attentive, many of the sketches giving the story almost word for word. Of course the older girls had written most accurately, but a few lines which little Flossie Barnet had written showed her tender, loving heart.

"I'm sorry for the poor old Spanyard, for a fountane like that wouldn't be *anywhere*, so I wish he and his brave men had sailed across the sea and land to hunt for something that he could truly find."

Some faulty spelling, but no error in the loving, tender heart. The pathos of the story had touched her.

Reginald was but a few months older than Flossie, but he was not sensitive, and only the adventure, the beauty described appealed to him. He looked at Flossie in surprise when she had finished reading her little sketch, and wondered that she could see anything pathetic in the tale.

Then he rose to read his own effort at story-telling.

"They tramped and tramped for miles through the trees and swamps, and I'd like to have worn a red velvet coat and hunt for that fountane, for if we hadn't found it we'd have had a jolly hunt. I'd like to have worn a red velvet coat and a big hat with fethers on it, and a pare of boots with big tops to them. We could

have tramped better with those big boots and all those fine things on."

A droll idea, truly. No wonder that the girls laughed at the vanity which Reginald had so innocently betrayed.

"Where did you get your description of his costume?" Aunt Charlotte asked. She could not help smiling.

"From a painting in my uncle's hall," said Reginald, promptly, "and when I told him that I wished that men wore clothes like that now, he just laughed, and said he thought those huge, long-plumed hats would be an awful nuisance."

The older girls were soon to study English history, and they felt very important indeed.

"We're bigger than Flossie and Katie and Reginald," said Jeanette, "so we are to have an extra study."

"We wouldn't want what you're going to have," Reginald said, "for it's just horrid. I told you my brother Bob said it was all full of chopping folks' heads off, and you didn't believe it, Jeanette Earl, but you'll find out it's so; you see 'f you don't."

Flossie slipped her hand into Reginald's, as if for protection.

"We wouldn't like to study it," she said, "and we won't like to hear it, but we'll have to when they say their lessons."

Dorothy and Nancy had been obliged to hurry home from school. They were to drive with Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte, and Mrs. Dainty had told them to be prompt.

Flossie and Reginald lingered after the others had gone. He gathered some blos-

soming weeds which grew near the cottage, thinking thus to cheer her, and to turn her mind from the hated English history.

She took the flowers, and for a time she laughed and talked so brightly that she seemed her sunny self.

He was just thinking how happy she looked when suddenly she leaned toward him, and said earnestly:

"Do you s'pose Bob was mistaken?"

Reginald hesitated. He ardently admired Bob, but he also cared for dear little Flossie, and longed to please her, so after a pause he said:

"My big brother knows *'most everything*, but just *p'r'aps* he might have been mistaken."

It was not much comfort, but it was better than if Reginald had insisted that Bob's knowledge was absolute.

As Mrs. Dainty's carriage bowled along the avenue, the trees seemed ablaze with autumn splendor, for the leaves that danced in the sunlight were scarlet and gold, and the sunbeams flickered and shimmered like merry elves.

The light breeze tossed the plumes on Dorothy's hat, and blew her golden curls about her lovely little face.

She leaned back in the carriage and laid her hand in Nancy's. Nancy's fingers were quick to clasp Dorothy's, and for a time they sat listening to what Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte Grayson were saying.

Then something made Nancy turn. A little figure was mincing along the avenue; its shoes had very high heels, its stockings were pink, and its dress a bright green. A showy hat with many-colored flowers

crowned its head, and as the carriage passed it waved a lace handkerchief, thus setting her many bangles tinkling.

"That *was* Patricia Lavine," said Nancy; "Mollie Merton said she saw her just a few days ago."

"O dear!" said Dorothy, "and it's not nice to say that when Patricia has just come back here to live, but truly she wasn't pleasant."

"I don't wonder you said, 'O dear,' for wherever she was, she made somebody uncomfortable," Nancy said, which was indeed true.

Patricia was not wholly at fault. She dearly loved anything that was showy, and her mother, who was a very ignorant woman, was quite as fond of display.

She had never taught her little daugh-

ter to be kind or courteous, but instead had laughed at her pert ways, and thought them amusing.

Patricia hastened along the avenue as fast as her little steeple heels would permit, and when she saw Flossie and Reginald, she rushed toward them, assuring them that she *never* had been so glad to see any one before.

Neither Flossie nor Reginald could say that they were quite as pleased, but Patricia did not wait for them to speak.

"We've been living in N' York," she said, "but we're going to live here now, an' we've got a el'gant house right next the schoolhouse. Ma says it's one of the finest houses in Merrivale, an' I guess — "

"If it's next to the schoolhouse it's the one where our cook's brother lives," remarked Reginald. "He lives on the first

floor, and the man that drives the water-cart lives just over him."

Patricia was annoyed. She had wished them to think that the entire house had been engaged for her own small family.

Her cheeks were flushed, but she made the best of the situation, and at once commenced to tell of the beauties of the flat.

"We lived in a great big hotel in N' York," she said, "but ma says this flat is handsomer than the one what we had at the hotel. Ma says I can give a party this winter, if I want to. Of course I'll invite *all* my N' York friends, but I shall only ask the girls here that have been nice to me, and I don't think I shall ask *any* boys at all."

She cast a withering glance at Reginald, who whistled softly. Then he made a naughty reply.

"P'r'aps the boys wouldn't come if you asked them," he said.

"Oh, Reginald!" said Flossie.

"Well, she said a mean thing 'bout not inviting boys, else I wouldn't have said it. I wouldn't speak like that to you or Dorothy, or any of the nice girls I know."

"There were nice boys in N' York," snapped Patricia. "I didn't see a boy while I was there who wasn't *very* nice."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT FLOSSIE DID

IN the great hall, at the Barnet house, the butler stood puzzling over the letters which the postman had left.

He dared not meddle with them, but he paused for a moment to study them as they lay upon his salver, while he wondered if the handwriting upon either envelope were in the least familiar.

The little French maid, peering over the baluster, laughed softly.

"M'sieur is curious, but he should not delay. The lettairs, it may be, of importance are, and the madam already waiting is."

With a soft, yet merry laugh, the maid returned to dress her mistress's hair, and the burly butler stalked up the stairway, angry that Marie should have seen him studying the letters, and annoyed by her saucy laugh.

"That girl is always 'round," he muttered.

It was Saturday morning, and although it was October, it was as warm as a June day.

Mrs. Barnet was in the hands of the French maid, and could not be disturbed while her hair was being dressed.

Flossie wondered what she could find to play with.

She wished that Saturday had been a schoolday.

Usually she found the baby amusing, but

Uncle Harry's little daughter was out for an airing.

The kitten skurried down the hall and Flossie caught her, and ran off to the music-room.

She managed to clamber up on to the stool with pussy in her arms, and reached for the music, which she opened.

"Now that's a *very* nice song, kitty," she said, "but you needn't sing it; you can just practise the 'comfrement. Now one, two, three, begin!"

She held the kitten's paws, and forced them to press the keys.

"Me-u! Me-u!" squeaked wee pussy.

"You going to sing and play, too? Why, that's fine," said Flossie, "only you don't get the tune right."

"Me-u! Me-u!" wailed the white kitten.

"Now pussy darling, you're real sweet to *try*, but you don't sing the tune right; it didn't sound like *that* when Uncle Harry sang it last night. We'll sing it together, and maybe you'll learn it. Put your left paw on *do*, and your right paw on *mi;* now sing."

What a droll duet it was! Franz Abt's beautiful song was never before thus rendered.

"I love thee, dearest, thee alone,
Love thee, and only thee!"

sang Flossie, while little pussy, regardless of time or sentiment, sang "me-u! me-*ow!* me-u! *me-u!*"

"Our voices don't *har-mer-lize*, pussy, I know they don't. You'll just have to practise alone. That's what Mollie Merton's mamma said last night when Uncle Harry and Aunt Vera sang together. She

"Put your left paw on *do*, and your right paw on *mi;* now sing."—*Page 106.*

said: 'Oh, how beautifully their voices *har-mer-lize.* Now that's just what our voices *don't* do, so I'll put you right on to the keys, and you can practise the *'comfrement* alone."

Flossie ran to the window to see if any of her playmates were in sight, while the kitten, left to amuse herself, walked slowly across the keyboard, and sat down upon the lower bass notes.

The French maid paused in the doorway.

"Ah, it is the petite beast that the bad music makes. I will the feline terrible remove, before she more mischief does do."

"Don't take the kitten out, Marie," cried Flossie, "I'm making her practise her lesson."

"Eh, bien! In this great mansion where all do so much learning have, even the

petite cat must an education get! What more astounding could one behold?"

"I want to make her learn the song Uncle Harry sang last night. Did you hear him sing, Marie? Wasn't his voice sweet?"

"Ah, well did I the music hear. The sweet sounds did up the stairway float, and I did say: 'He is one beau gallant! His voice the rock would melt! Many hearts he must broken have before he loved Madame Vera who now his wife is.'"

"I don't know what you mean, Marie," Flossie said, "but I do know I *love* him, and I love to hear him sing."

"Oh, I could listen the day and the night when he music makes," the maid replied, and Flossie was satisfied.

A moment later Mollie, in great excitement, ran over to call for Flossie.

"Oh, do you know, Dorothy's mamma told my mamma that there's to be a great party at the stone house, and all of Dorothy's friends are to be invited. Now aren't you glad I came over to tell you?"

"When is it to be? I guess I am glad, Mollie Merton, and so will everybody be. When is the party to be?" she repeated, her blue eyes shining, and her little feet restlessly dancing.

"I don't know just when, but I guess it's pretty soon, and it's to be different from any party we ever went to. I don't know just *how* different; that part is a secret, but we are to know as soon as the invitations are ready."

"Oh, we *'most* can't wait," said Flossie.

Of course the delightful news travelled,

and by Monday morning every child in town knew that there was to be a grand party at the great stone house, but no one could find out just what sort of party it was to be. Even Dorothy could not enlighten them.

"It's to be fine," she said, "and different from any party I ever had, but mamma doesn't wish me to tell anything about it."

"Won't she let you tell Nancy?" questioned Katie Dean.

"Nancy knows *now!*" declared Reginald; "just look at her!"

Indeed Nancy's dark eyes were merry, and her voice rippled with laughter, as she said:

"I *do* know, and I'm going to keep the secret, but it's the hardest one I ever tried to keep."

At recess they walked arm-in-arm, talking of the party instead of playing games. They were chattering so gaily that they heard no one approach, and when suddenly Patricia Lavine peeped over the wall, they were startled, and wondered how she could have appeared without any one having seen her coming.

"Why, Patricia! Where'd you come from?" said Mollie.

"Oh, I was walking along and came over because I heard you talking. Whose party is it going to be?" she asked.

"Dorothy is to have the party," said Jeanette, "but why aren't you in school?"

"Why aren't *you?*" Patricia asked with a saucy laugh.

"It's recess time at *our* school," said Nina.

"Well, it's recess time at *ours*, too," Patricia replied.

"But you're a long way from your school," Reginald said.

"Am I?" queried Patricia, "well, I don't have to go to school every single day, as *some* folks do," she retorted.

"I know 'most all the tables now, and I know a little geog-er-fry, and 'most half of the history, 'cause some of it I learned when I was in N' York. We had a el'gant school there, and ma says I learned so much that I needn't go to school every day now."

Little Flossie looked quite impressed, but the older girls were not so sure that Patricia had gained so much knowledge.

No one spoke, and Patricia thought that they were all much surprised at what she had said.

"There's to be visitors at our school to-day, and teacher said she was going to let them ask questions," she continued.

"Guess you stayed away so as not to tell all you know," said Reginald.

Katie nudged him sharply, but he only twitched away, laughing because Patricia looked angry.

The little silver bell tinkled, and they turned to enter the cottage.

"Good-by," they called to Patricia, who stood at the gate.

"Good-by," she replied, then looking over her shoulder, she said:

"I'm glad I don't have to go to private school; it's too stupid."

"The horrid, rude girl," whispered Nina Earl, but Arabella surprised them all by saying:

"I think I'd like that Patricia What's-her-name; she isn't like everybody else."

Reginald heard what Arabella said, and in a loud whisper informed her that he wouldn't go to school if *all* the girls were like Patricia.

Arabella would have answered him sharply, but they were entering the schoolroom, so she was obliged to be silent.

Later, when they were asked to write upon the little blackboard, Arabella looked for a chance to tease Reginald.

"If he does anything that I can laugh at, I'll laugh till he's mad as a hornet," she whispered.

It happened that Reginald was the first to go to the board.

Aunt Charlotte asked for a sentence which should contain but five words, and yet tell a bit of news.

Every hand was raised.

Dorothy intended to write: "Nancy is a true friend," while Nancy thought that this would be interesting: "Dorothy will have a party," but Reginald felt sure that he had thought of the smartest sentence, and his face beamed with delight when he was told that he might write it.

He glanced toward Arabella as he strutted to the blackboard, and boldly he wrote:

"Phido has a new collar."

It was funny, and Reginald wondered why even Aunt Charlotte looked amused. Every one knew Fido, and only that morning the little dog had followed Reginald and Katie half-way to school, the bell on his new collar tinkling all the way.

That Reginald should have spelled the name "*Phido*" made them laugh, but Ara-

bella was not contented with laughing; she fairly shouted.

"Well, I don't care if you do laugh," he said, his eyes blazing as he looked at her; "you spell photo, just *p-h-o*, and why can't Fido be spelt *P-h-i?*"

When the room was again quiet Aunt Charlotte told Reginald and Arabella to remain for a few moments after school.

When the other pupils had gone, Aunt Charlotte turned toward the two who still kept their seats, and very gently she told Arabella how rude it was to laugh at another's error, and how equally rude for Reginald to reply in so saucy a manner.

"A little girl should be a little lady," she said, "and a small boy should surely be a little gentleman."

Then Reginald spoke.

Looking straight into Arabella's eyes, he said:

"I guess I'm a gentleman, so I'll 'pol'-gize; if I was just a boy I *wouldn't*, though."

Arabella was fully equal to a reply.

"I'm as much a lady as you are a gentleman, so I'll say I oughtn't to have laughed, but I *won't* say I'm sorry."

It was late afternoon, and Flossie, on the piazza, waved her hand to her playmates as they ran down the walk to the gate.

They had played delightful games, they had talked of the fine party which they would soon enjoy, they had guessed and guessed what sort of party it was to be, and Dorothy, who knew all about it, had laughed merrily because their countless guesses were nowhere near right.

"I wish playmates didn't ever have to go home," said Flossie, as she ran into the house.

There was no one in the hall save the baby, who sat in her carriage. The maid had just brought her in from a long ride, and had left her for a moment while she chatted with the butler and the cook. Flossie loved the baby, and she ran to the carriage to kiss the sunny little face that smiled at her.

"Oh, you lovely, lovely baby," she cried, "are you glad to see me?"

For answer the little one cooed sweetly, and snatched at Flossie's curling hair.

"Mustn't pull so hard, baby," pleaded Flossie, and just at that moment the maid returned, and rescued Flossie's ringlets from the little dimpled hands.

"You give her to me," said Flossie.

"I'll sit on this rug and hold her. Uncle Harry said I could take this baby any time I want to, and I want to now."

The maid waited for no urging. Here was a chance for a few more moments of gossip. If Miss Flossie wished to take care of the baby, why not permit her to? Her Uncle Harry had given his permission, and as it was his baby, who could object?

For a few moments Flossie and the baby played upon the great hall rug. The bright-colored ball which Flossie had taken from her pocket was a pretty plaything, and the baby crowed with delight.

The butler and the maids were in the butler's pantry at the rear of the hall, but while their voices could be plainly heard, Flossie noticed nothing which they said until the maid spoke of the baby.

"She ees well, the petite belle, but upon

her cheek the, what ees eet the doctaire did say?"

"Sure, Marie, 'tis a ould-fashioned rash, an' manny's the toime Oive seen ut on a babby's face, an' whoile the docthor makes a fuss about it, it's just nothin' at all, at all," responded Bridget.

"I'm thinkin' it don't pay to let it go an' not have the doctor see about it," growled the butler in a deep bass voice.

"An' ain't they seein' about it wid all their eyes, the ould docthor a-peekin' at the swate little thing t'rough his goggles, an' puttin' a wee bit t'ermom'ter into her mouth what for I do' 'no' unless 'tis ter foind out if it's near toime fer her ter be a-talkin'."

"He's very ugly, le m'sieur doctaire; if he was fine to behold it would be well. And what said he of the child? That at

home she could not remain? If they do away take her M'sieur Harry will weep his fine eyes out."

"Oh, you little Frenchie!" exclaimed the butler with a jolly laugh, "you get things mixed. If it's nothing but a rash, as Bridget says, she'll stay here, but if it's measles she'll be hurried off up-stairs, and —"

"An' be *quarantained*, Oim tould," interrupted Bridget.

"Oh, Breejhay, what *ees* that?" cried the little French maid, and Flossie waited to hear no more.

Quarantined! Oh, what a big word, and what *did* it mean? Who was going to do *that* to dear Uncle Harry's baby?

No one! She would not let them!

Quickly she gathered the wee mite in her arms, wrapped the warm little cloak

around her, and walking softly to the door, slipped out, the baby nestled close in her arms.

Across the lawn she trudged, past the summer-house, and on to the little clump of trees and shrubs which the children called the grove.

In a little nook between the tall hedge and the shrubbery she sat down, and took the baby on her lap. Fortunately it had no idea of crying; she loved Flossie, and she cooed contentedly.

And now the shadows were long, and the light breeze, growing stronger, swept in little chilly gusts across the treetops, and searching lower, tossed the small shrubs as if trying to discover Flossie's hiding-place.

She drew the baby's cloak closer around it, and bending lower, kissed it, and whispered lovingly:

"You're all safe with me, for I won't let that old doctor *quantine* you. You're Uncle Harry's own baby, and I won't let anybody hurt you."

CHAPTER VII

PATRICIA'S PROMISE

AT the Barnet house all was excitement. Servants were rushing this way and that, searching for Flossie and the baby.

Again and again the maid insisted that she had left them in the hall but a few moments, and the cook and the butler declared that she had spoken truly, yet it seemed strange that in so short a time the two could have so completely disappeared.

In the midst of the excitement Uncle Harry came home, and he looked very grave when he learned the cause of their alarm.

Yes, the house and grounds had been

thoroughly searched, they told him, and neither could be found, nor could any one remember having seen them after the baby had been brought in from her ride.

And while the other members of the household were searching in every direction, Uncle Harry secured a lantern, and went out into the shadowy garden, hoping that he might, in some forgotten corner, find the two children whom he so dearly loved.

Around the house, along the driveway toward the stable, down a little path to where the tall dahlias nodded; across the lawn to the open space where the new moon spread its sheen, then toward the shrubbery and the hedge.

Flossie saw the gleam of the bright lantern through the bushes, and huddled closer to the little shrubs. She believed

that it was the butler who carried the lantern, and that he had been sent to capture the baby.

"Hush, hush — sh — sh!" she whispered, patting its shoulder gently.

It had no idea of crying, but she was so afraid that it might, and thus tell where they were hiding. It happened that the baby was sleepy, and snug and warm in Flossie's loving arms, it was quite content.

Nearer, and yet nearer came the light! Now it was going farther from her, — now returning, and now, oh, she must hold her breath!

A firm step trampled the underbrush, the lantern was swung high, and the two runaways were discovered. With a sob Flossie clasped the infant closer, hiding its face with her own.

"You sha'n't have this baby!" she

cried, " for I won't let you! Nobody shall touch my Uncle Harry's baby; nobody's going to *quantine* her. I'm 'fraid out here, but I'll stay to take care of his own baby! "

" Flossie! Flossie, little girl, who has frightened you? Why are you hiding out here with the baby? "

" Go away! " she cried, holding the baby closer, " they've sent you to find us, but you don't know that they're going to *quantine* this baby, but I'll never let them do it."

" Flossie, Flossie, you're frightened, listen to me."

He put the lantern down, and seating himself upon the grass, placed his strong arm around Flossie, drawing the two closer as if to protect them.

" They *are* going to *quantine* this baby! " she cried, " and they sha'n't cut her head

off 'cause there's spots on her face. She's your baby, and oh, I *love* you both! "

The wild note in her voice showed how genuine was her terror.

" Nobody shall harm baby, I promise you that, dear," said Uncle Harry, an odd quiver in his voice, " and you were a dear little girl to take care of her for me, but now I must take you both up to the house, for every one is hunting for you."

" But Bridget said they'd have to quantine," — sobbed Flossie.

" Bridget was mistaken," he said, " and besides, no one is harmed by being quarantined. I'll tell you all about that at another time. You are about chilled through, and as you're not very huge, I guess I'll carry you both."

There was no help for it, so Flossie laid her head upon his shoulder, the baby, sound

asleep, still in her arms, and Uncle Harry strode across the lawn, up to the piazza, and into the hall, where a frightened group were talking.

They crowded around him to learn where he had found them, but he raised his hand to stop the eager questioning.

Flossie had been badly frightened, and he felt that she must not be excited.

Once in her own little room with her mother bending over her, she listened eagerly while Uncle Harry explained what the maids had meant, and she sighed happily when she at last realized that the baby was safe from harm, and that she would remain right under the roof of their beautiful home.

When on the following day the old doctor called to see the baby, he laughed heartily at the story of Flossie's fear, and he

declared that Flossie must have done a very fine thing for the baby. Its little pink cheeks were fair, and the tiny spots which had so frightened its young mother had been chased away, so the doctor said, by its long stay out in the evening air.

"Then I *did* do something nice for that baby," said Flossie, to which Uncle Harry responded:

"You were a brave little niece, Flossie," and Flossie was happy.

When the postman called on the morning of the next day, he brought an invitation for the long-dreamed-of party.

Then the secret was out as to what kind of party it was to be.

A fancy dress party! A costume carnival!

Of course the first question that each little friend asked of the other was:

"What are you going to wear?"

"Why, our prettiest party dresses, of course," said Mollie Merton.

Mollie, who was always very positive, was greatly surprised when Dorothy overtook them on the way to school, and explained that each little guest was expected to appear in a costume which should represent some well-known character in history or story.

"And mamma says we are not to tell each other what we're going to be," said Dorothy; "we're to wear long dominoes over our frocks, and we'll dance and play games, just peeping through eyeholes to see where we're going."

"And nobody'll know who anybody is," chimed in Nancy, "for Mrs. Dainty and

Aunt Charlotte will receive, and Dorothy will walk up to greet them, so neither of us will even know who Dorothy is."

"What fun!" cried Jeanette, and the little group laughed gaily.

"Any boys besides me invited?" questioned Reginald.

"Yes, indeed, there are ever so many boys invited," Dorothy said. "My cousins Russell and Arthur are coming, and three of papa's nephews will be here. I've never met them, but they're coming for a little visit of a few days, and I'm to have my party while they're here."

"If you girls are going to wear those funny long cloaks, of course they'll hide who you are, but you'll every one of you know us fellows," said Reginald, who felt that the girls were more favored.

"Indeed, we won't know you," laughed

Dorothy, "for papa insists that you boys must wear dominoes, too."

"Hurrah for us, I say!" shouted Reginald; "we'll have as much fun as you girls will."

"And we've two weeks to wait," said Katie Dean, "and all that time we're not to tell what we're to be."

"Nor even the color of our dominoes," said Jeanette.

"I sha'n't tell what I'm to be," Reginald proudly said, "but some of you girls will just *have* to tell; girls can't keep a secret."

"We can keep a secret, Reginald Dean," said Mollie, to which Flossie chimed in:

"Yes, indeed we can. I *can't* tell what I'm to be, because I don't know; mamma hasn't told me, but I *do* know what color I'm to wear, and I won't tell that!"

Reginald liked to tease.

"Somebody'll tell something, see 'f they don't!" he said, nodding and laughing.

It was now just a week from the day set for the party.

Arabella, hurrying along the avenue, tried to thrust her arms into the sleeves of her jacket.

"O dear! I shouldn't think this jacket had any armholes!" she cried impatiently.

She had hurried out before Aunt Matilda could stop her, and she was trying to get her jacket on without pausing to do so. At last her arms were in her sleeves, and she looked ahead to see if any one was in sight.

"She'll be awful cross if I'm late," thought Arabella, and she tried to run even faster.

There were two reasons for Arabella's haste. The first was that she had promised to meet Patricia, and the second reason was that it was Saturday morning, and if she remained at home Aunt Matilda would be sure to find something for her to do. Of course Aunt Matilda would ask where she had been, and why she had run out so early, and oh, no end of questions!

"It'll be by-'m-bye when Aunt Matilda questions me," whispered Arabella, adding cheerfully: "and by-'m-bye isn't *now*."

"Hello!" called Patricia, "you're some late, but not *very*."

"Why, I'm here as soon as you are," said Arabella.

"I know that," Patricia replied, "but I thought you'd be over to my house by this time."

"Aren't we 'most there?" questioned Arabella.

"Almost, and not quite," said Patricia, "and anyway I was going to stop at a store before I go over to my house. Ma gave me some money and I'm going to spend it for candy. Have you got any to spend?"

Arabella shook her head.

"Aunt Matilda won't let me spend money; she has her views about folks spending money, she says."

"I wouldn't want her for *my* aunt," said Patricia.

"Well, she isn't your aunt," snapped Arabella, and now they had reached the little candy store, and Patricia, grasping Arabella's hand, walked boldly in.

Arabella was greatly impressed, and when Patricia asked her which kind she

would like to have, she managed to just whisper that *any* kind would do.

At Arabella's home Aunt Matilda reigned supreme, and it was said that no one, not even Mr. Corryville, dared spend any money, unless Aunt Matilda approved, but that might not be true.

Arabella thought it very grand that Patricia had enough money to buy whatever she wished, and her surprise increased when she chose a half-pound of two different kinds, ordering the clerk to put them in separate papers.

"You can have that bundle, and I'll have this," said Patricia, as they left the store, "and now we'll go over to my house, it's that one next to the school."

Arabella looked toward the house at which Patricia pointed. It did not look at all like the homes of her other friends.

Patricia rang the bell, and they heard the lock slip, then they commenced to mount the stairs. The building was four stories high, and Patricia lived on the top floor.

"We like the top floor because it's so airy," she said.

Arabella said nothing, but when they were seated cosily in the corners of an old sofa, each with her package of candy, Arabella was glad that she had come.

A few moments later Patricia's mother entered. She was showily dressed, and her many pieces of jewelry made Arabella stare. She did not know that those glittering rings and bangles were worth very little money.

"Now, Patricia, you know I don't like to have you buy so much candy," whined Mrs. Lavine.

"I haven't *much* candy," replied Pa-

tricia, "that Arabella's got belongs to her."

Arabella looked quickly at Patricia. Was not that a sort of fib? Patricia had not *said* that Arabella had bought her package of candy, but she had certainly intended her mother to think so.

Mrs. Lavine took a book from the table, and sat down by the window to read.

Soon Patricia became restless.

"Let's go out again," she said, and in a few moments they were running down the stairs, and out into the street.

"I've got a little more money, and we'll have some ice cream," said Patricia.

Arabella wondered where she got her money, but dared not ask her, and while she was thinking about it Patricia spoke.

"I asked you over to my house because I think I'd like you for my best friend,"

she said, " and because I've got something to tell you."

Arabella stared at her through her glasses, but she said nothing.

" You're sort of old-fashioned," Patricia continued, " but I guess we can play together nicely, and you needn't be provoked at what I said, for we're going to have a secret the very first thing, and I'll tell it to you when we're having our ice cream."

They entered a tiny store which the sign stated was an " Ice Cream Parlor." There was room for but three little tables, but Arabella thought it quite grand, for the wall-paper was covered with gaudy flowers, and the ice cream was very pink.

They took tiny sips that the treat might last longer, and Arabella watched Patricia, and waited to hear what she had to tell.

At last Patricia lost patience.

"Why don't you ask what the secret is?" she asked.

"Why don't you tell it if it's worth telling?" Arabella asked, coolly.

"I *guess* it's worth telling," said Patricia. "Say, you'll be at Dorothy Dainty's party, won't you?"

"Of course I'll be there; my costume is 'most done."

"What's it going to be?"

"Why, don't you remember we are not to tell any one what we are to wear; not even the color of our dominoes?" Arabella asked in surprise.

"Well, we didn't promise not to tell," said Patricia, "and, anyway, I'm going to tell you. Ma has made me a Spanish dress, all spangles, and red ribbons, and gold tinsel, and my domino that will cover

it for the first of the evening will be bright yellow! I've told you, Arabella Corryville, because now you'll know which I am, as soon as you see me, and you'll be just mean if you don't tell me now what you're going to wear."

Arabella hesitated.

"Dorothy wouldn't like to have us tell," she said.

"Well, we needn't tell her we told, and what about *me?* Here I've treated you to candy and ice cream, and told you all about my costume. If you were half-nice, you'd think you *ought* to tell me about yours."

Patricia's voice sounded grieved, and Arabella wavered.

Ought she to tell? She knew she ought not, but Patricia urged again.

"And I was going to say we could each wear a blue ribbon on the third buttonhole

of our dominoes, so we'd know each other the minute we got there. And, say," she continued, "have you ever been all over the stone house?"

"Not in every room," said Arabella.

"Have you been in the observatory?"

"The *what?*" asked Arabella.

Patricia was sure that she had made a mistake.

"The room where the flowers are?" she said.

"Oh, the *conservatory*, you mean," Arabella said, grandly. "No, I haven't been in there, but I've seen the flowers from the doorway, and they're lovely."

"Well, they're twice as lovely when you're right in the room with them. I *know*, because I've been in there!" said Patricia.

"*When?*" queried Arabella.

"The last time I was there," Patricia replied, "and *now* I'll tell you something; there's something in that room that I know about, and not another girl knows it but me. I won't tell you what it is now, but at the party I'll do better than *tell* you; I'll *show* you. We'll go out into the hall when nobody is looking at us, and we'll go into the what-you-call-it, — "

"The conservatory," prompted Arabella.

"The conservatory," repeated Patricia, "and then you'll see *what* you'll see! I *promise* to surprise you."

"Don't you tell if I tell you," said Arabella.

"No, *'ndeed*," Patricia agreed.

"Well, Aunt Matilda said she wouldn't let me wear anything *flighty*, so she's made

me a dress like a Puritan, and my domino is tan color."

Arabella's curiosity forced her to tell all that Patricia longed to know, because she was simply wild to visit the conservatory, and find out what it was that Patricia could show.

With vows of secrecy they parted, Patricia walking slowly homeward; Arabella running all the way.

"Aunt Matilda'll say something, I guess, when she sees me," she whispered as she ran. "First thing she'll ask where I've been, and oh, I never thought to take those horrid pills! The bottle is in my pocket, and I've eaten candy and ice cream! It's lucky she don't know *that;* if she did she'd say, 'I shouldn't wonder if that child had fits before morning!' She don't know it, and p'r'aps I won't have the fits."

CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTY

LIGHTS blazed from every window of the stone house, the great garden was brilliantly lighted, even the twinkling stars overhead seemed brighter than usual, as if they knew of the party, and were laughing as they watched the little guests arriving.

Lightly they stepped from their carriages, and flew up the steps as if their feet had wings.

What was their surprise to see the man-servant, at the door as usual, to be sure, but in a fine old suit of livery that made him look like an English serving-man of many, many years ago.

Yes, there was the maid in the hall in a cute Watteau costume, a tiny lace cap on her head, and a kerchief over her flowered gown. She presented her salver, and each little guest laid a card upon it, with the name of the character which she represented. These were merely to be kept as souvenirs, that later Dorothy might look them over, and see what a variety of noted personages had called to do her honor.

They were not to be announced, for while the names of the girls' costumes would not tell *which* girl wore it, the characters that the boys took would of course be male personages.

So the little guests tripped through the great hall, and into the long drawing-room, where another surprise awaited them.

There stood handsome Mr. Dainty in royal robes, as a king, his beautiful wife in

velvet and ermine as his queen, and gentle Aunt Charlotte as lady-in-waiting.

How quaint the little figures looked in their long, cloak-like dominoes of red, blue, pink, green, white, lilac, and indeed every known color and tint.

As they each extended a little hand, they peeped at host and hostess through the eye-holes in their dominoes, and if they were recognized, they did not know it.

Now and then a ripple of stifled laughter told how greatly they enjoyed their disguise.

When all had been greeted, Mrs. Dainty raised her sceptre, and when the little figures were all attention she spoke.

"Dear little subjects, we are happy to have you with us, and for a short time we wish you to wear the long dominoes which keep us guessing who you are. And now

we will listen to some music, and while you listen you shall enjoy a wealth of royal bonbons."

At a signal from the queen the little Watteau maid entered, followed by five other maids in similar costumes, each bearing trays of candies.

At the same moment sweet strains of music sounded through the room, coming from behind a group of palms and flowering plants.

The bonbons were delicious, and the merry music set little feet tapping beneath the long cloaks.

Two figures sat very close together. One wore a bright yellow cloak, the other domino was a quiet tan color. They were Arabella and Patricia, and while they sat eating their bonbons, they talked softly, that no one might hear them. A little figure in

a long red cloak leaned against the wall, listening to the music, and at the same time watching the two who talked together.

It was Reginald who watched them, and his eyes twinkled as he whispered:

"I just *know* that those two are girls, and they've gone and told each other who they are. *I'd* like to know who they are, too, and I guess I'll walk over there."

He made his way across the room, and soon was standing just behind them.

The musicians were playing a sprightly polka. A triangle marked the measures, and Reginald's red shoe tapped the floor beneath his long red cloak.

The two who sat upon the divan were talking in what they thought to be a very low tone, but when suddenly the music ceased, Patricia's voice could be plainly heard.

"Why, Arabella!" she said, and then, surprised at hearing her own voice, she said no more.

Reginald laughed softly, and Patricia turned to look at him, but of course could not guess who the red-cloaked figure might be. Oh, it was fun to be hiding behind the gay-colored dominoes! It was almost like hide-and-seek.

And now the beautiful queen was speaking.

"We will have a pretty march now," she said. "My king and I will lead, my lady-in-waiting will follow me, while you, my merry subjects, shall form, two by two, and march to grandest music. After the march, the dominoes shall be cast aside, and then — " she paused, then laughing gaily she concluded, "*then* I shall know who my guests are."

The trumpet's blare told all to be ready! The king and queen came down from their red velvet throne, the stately lady-in-waiting followed, and then the bright-hued figures, two by two, marched like a moving rainbow after the tall figures who led.

Around the great drawing-room in graceful figures the gorgeous little procession moved. How bright their colors appeared, the light shimmering upon a pink cloak beside a blue one, a green cloak walking with a yellow one, a scarlet one with a white, a buff one with bright cherry-hued domino!

But the greatest excitement came when, after the march, the colored cloaks were cast aside, and the laughing playmates were revealed.

"Did you know me?"

"Did you guess who I was?"

"Did you know you were talking to me?"

These were the questions which they asked each other, and the gracious king and queen looked down upon their merry courtiers, and admired their brilliant costumes.

And what a variety there was! First of all, Dorothy, as an elf in gauze and spangles, was a lovely sprite to look upon.

Near her stood Nancy, dressed as a shepherdess. Dorothy's cousin, Russell Dalton, made a charming page, while his sister, Aline, was a flower girl. Reginald strutted about in an early Spanish costume, and he had chosen his own dress.

"I can't look old enough for Ponce de Leon," he had said, "but I want a suit like the one he wears in the painting that hangs in the hall."

His wish had been granted, and he

looked like a tiny cavalier about to sally forth in search of fortune, or undiscovered countries.

Mollie Merton made a pretty Red-riding-hood, while, as usual, close beside her, stood Flossie Barnet as Little Bo-Peep.

"Anybody'd know I'm Bo-peep, because I've this crook in my hand," said Flossie, "but look at Nina and Jeanette; what are they?"

"We're Spring and Summer," Jeanette answered with a laugh at Flossie's little puzzled face, "I am a rose, and she's a crocus," she continued, "and have you seen Katie Dean yet? She's a lovely butterfly. There she is now."

They all turned to look at Katie as she came toward them. She was indeed a dainty butterfly. Her frock of yellow gauze matched her wings, which were edged

with gold, and as she ran toward them, she looked as if she might fly if she wished.

Arabella looked very demure as a little Puritan, and really, Patricia's showy Spanish costume was becoming.

There were many more guests, and all were in beautiful costumes. The room was alive with color, and when, later, they danced to merry music, it seemed, indeed, a joyous carnival.

The games came next, and how they played! And of all the games they found one very old one to be the most delightful. Some one asked if they might play it, and thus it happened that the king announced that the next would be "A Journey to Nubia."

The maids entered, and quickly placed two rows of chairs, back to back, down

the centre of the room, placing *one less* chair than there were children.

When the music sounded they were to march around and around the rows of chairs, but when the music should stop abruptly, they must rush to get a seat. The one child who would be left standing must pay a forfeit.

A stirring march was played, and the children walked around the chairs, and every time that they came to the end of the line they paused, believing that the music would cease, but the musicians played on and on. The laughing children marched gaily, when, in the middle of a lively strain, the music stopped, and they rushed for seats.

It was Nancy who found no chair, and she knew that she must pay a forfeit.

"What shall I do?" she asked, and

Russell, who liked Nancy, asked if he might set the task for her.

He was given permission, and turning to her he said: "I'll ask something, Nancy, that I know you can do. I'll beg you to dance for us."

"Oh, you need not beg," Nancy said sweetly, "if they will play a waltz, I'll gladly dance for you."

Softly they played a bewitching melody, and Nancy, running out to an open space, danced till those who watched her were wild with delight. And when the dance was finished they crowded around her, crying in wonder:

"Oh, Nancy, how can you do it so gracefully?"

"You wouldn't wonder if you only knew how long I studied, and how many hours I practised," she said.

"I couldn't dance like that if I practised for ten years," said Russell.

"I don't believe he could," laughed his sister Aline, "his talent is surely not for dancing, for only the other day he told me that at dancing-school, just as sure as he tried not to step on his partner's toes, he always trod on his own."

"It's just what I do," agreed Russell, joining in the laughter that greeted Aline's words.

Again and again they marched around the double row of chairs, and each time the one caught standing was made to pay a forfeit, to the delight of all the others.

For the next game they clasped hands and formed a great ring. Dorothy, in the centre, extended her arms as she sang this verse:

"As around you gaily dance,
I must see if, just by chance,
In your ring which has no end,
You do hold my dearest friend.
Yes, my truest friend I see,
Nancy, dearest, come to me."

Nancy ran into the circle, and the others, clasping hands, danced around them singing gaily:

"See the happy, merry two,
One with brown eyes, one with blue,
One is dark and one is fair,
Which of us will join them there?"

It was Nancy's turn now to choose a friend from the ring, and she at once chose Flossie.

Flossie was the youngest of the little guests, and she was delighted to be so soon chosen.

Unnoticed by the children, several new arrivals had entered the room. They were

a few of Mrs. Dainty's nearest neighbors who had been invited to come in during the evening and see the merrymaking.

As Flossie stood in the centre of the ring with Dorothy and Nancy, she looked toward the playmates who circled around them, and was about to choose Mollie, when she spied Uncle Harry, and she laughed with delight. He was dressed as an English squire of an early century. Quickly she whispered to Dorothy.

"May I, oh, *may* I?" she asked.

"Yes, oh, *do*," laughed Dorothy.

"I choose you, Uncle Harry," she cried, "oh, come quick."

Never too dignified to have a bit of fun, and always ready to please the children, he hurried forward and entered the ring.

"As if I'd lose a moment in joining three such charming young ladies," he

said, while the laughing children danced yet faster around the merry four.

How handsome he looked as he stood among his little friends. A brave, athletic young man he was, with a heart full of love for the children, who returned his affection with interest.

"Now, Uncle Harry, it's your turn to sing," said Flossie. "Do you know the verse you ought to sing?"

"I don't believe I do know the one which belongs in this game, but I'll sing one of my own," he said with a laugh.

> "You are so charming, all in a ring,
> Hardly I know of which siren to sing,
> Yet if I *must* choose, then it shall be
> Mollie, bright Mollie to come unto me."

His was a fine voice, and he sang his improvised verse to the music of one of his favorite songs, "Beautiful Dreamer."

"Oh, I wish you had to sing ever so many verses," Jeanette said impulsively, and he bowed to her earnestly spoken compliment.

They had paused for a moment to rest, and for a time their hands were unclasped. Patricia thought that this was just her chance. She touched Arabella's arm.

"Come," she whispered, and Arabella followed.

It happened that no one noticed that the two had left their playmates, and soon they were flying around in a circle, singing their verses, and choosing as before.

The conservatory was brightly lighted, and the perfume of the flowers was rich and heavy. The fountain plashed in its shallow basin, and it seemed like a glimpse of fairyland. Patricia looked about to see

if any one had followed them, but no one was near.

"Now this is what I'm going to show you," she said. "You see that one lovely fountain?"

Oh, yes, Arabella saw that.

"Well, there's *two* fountains, and *I* know where the other one is. I'll let you try to find it first, and if you can't find it, I'll show it to you."

"How do *you* know where it is?" questioned Arabella.

Patricia looked very important.

"I know, because I *do* know," she said.

Arabella looked into this corner, and peeped into that, and between them they managed to tip over some small pots of valuable plants, but the music and laughter in the drawing-room prevented any

sounds in the conservatory from being heard. At last Arabella was disgusted.

"I don't believe there's two fountains," she said.

"Then I'll *show* you," said Patricia, "and I'll tell you how I know. Just see here," and she pointed to the jet of water which flew high in air, letting fall a veil of mist and spray.

"That's where the butler turns the water on to set the fountain playing. I was in here once when I saw him turn that little thing round, and I saw the water fly right up in a minute."

Arabella watched Patricia closely.

"But where's the *other* fountain?" she asked impatiently.

"Oh, you'll see in a second. Come over here," Patricia said, laughing softly.

"There!" she said, pointing to a pipe

"There! that's another fountain." — *Page 164.*

that ran along the floor beneath a shelf filled with flowering plants; "that's *another* fountain, and I should think they'd have both playing when they have a party."

"That's *not* a fountain!" said Arabella.

"Well, I guess I know, and so will you in a second, for I'm going to set it going. See here!"

"Fizz-z-sss!"

A cloud of steam filled the little conservatory, and the two frightened girls screamed with terror, believing that nothing less than an explosion had happened. The servants rushed in and quickly turned off the steam, while Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte, who had hastened to the rescue, tried to quiet the fear of the mischief-makers.

Not a word was said of the beautiful

plants which were now completely ruined, and Mrs. Dainty's kindness made Patricia feel ashamed.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, and no one had ever before heard her say that.

Arabella was fairly hysterical, laughing and crying at the same time, but Aunt Charlotte at last succeeded in calming her, and when the little banquet was announced, they joined the other children, and were as happy as any of the merry party that marched out to the great dining-room.

CHAPTER IX

TWO SLEIGHRIDES

IN the centre of the table was a huge round cake encrusted with gorgeous frosting in the forms of beautiful flowers. Around its sides were festoons of buds and blossoms, while here and there a sugar butterfly was poised as if ready for flight.

There were flowers beside every plate, there were ices in wonderful shapes, there were bonbons and nuts in abundance, while great silver baskets were heaped with luscious fruits.

What a treat it was! How they laughed and talked as they enjoyed the feast! How bright the lights, how sweet the scent of

the lovely flowers with which every room was decorated!

From the drawing-room the tender music floated in. Oh, it was like a dream of fairy-land!

Nina Earl watched Patricia closely.

"I guess you never saw a finer party than *this*," she said.

Patricia stared for a moment, then she said just what one might have expected.

"This *is* a lovely party, and I never saw a grander one except one I went to when I was in N' York, where they had a cake as big as this whole table, and — "

"Then the table to hold such a cake as that must have been pretty big to get inside of any room!" laughed Reginald.

"Well, you didn't see it, so you can't know how grand it looked," Patricia re-

plied, and as that was quite true, Reginald had nothing to say.

Lola Blessington sat beside Nancy, and many of the older guests watched the two as they talked together, and thought how charming they were, and how very unlike.

Lola's blue eyes were merry, and her sea-nymph's costume was very becoming, while Nancy's fine dark eyes and graceful figure never looked prettier than in her lovely shepherdess frock.

At Nancy's right sat Dorothy, and her beautiful little face showed the joy that was in her heart. She was always happiest when giving pleasure to others.

And when at last the feast had been enjoyed, more merry games had been played, and tripping feet had danced to lively measures, then the great hall clock hands

pointed to the hour, and the guests remembered that it was quite time to be thinking of home.

A surprise awaited the merrymakers, for when good-nights had been said, and they stepped out into the crisp air, they shouted with delight, for lo, while they had been in the warm, flower-scented rooms, a snowstorm had been covering the steps, the gardens, the avenue with a white velvet carpet!

"Hurrah!" shouted Reginald, "this is the first snowstorm, and there'll be fun every day as long as it lasts."

Long icicles hung like diamond pendants from roof and balcony, and still the snowflakes like downy feathers were falling lazily, as if they knew not whether to pause, or to continue to descend.

And when the last carriage had rolled

down the driveway Dorothy turned, and clasping Nancy's hands, she said:

"Oh, there never was such a perfect party! We'll always remember it."

"Always," said Nancy.

There were two thoughts, two pictures in her mind. She was thinking of Dorothy's first party, when, as a little outcast, she had climbed up into the branches of a tree which overhung the great garden, that thus she might peep at the lovely children in their beautiful frocks; now, as Dorothy's friend and playmate, she had enjoyed this fancy dress party, in a costume as charming as that of any guest.

She was happy now, and how dearly she loved Dorothy, how grateful she was for her home and friends!

For days they talked of nothing but the party, and Aunt Charlotte found it a little

difficult to keep them from whispering about it during school hours.

Three little guests who had intended to come, had, at the last moment, been obliged to remain at home. They were Mr. Dainty's nephews, and they had been much disappointed in losing a charming visit in which a fine party was to have been included.

Patricia, with her usual lack of sweetness, told Arabella that she did not believe that those three boys had ever *thought* of coming.

"Well, anyway, *we* were there, and we had a fine time, but say, — there *weren't* two fountains after all!" said Arabella.

"Why, what a thing to say, when I showed you the second one, only it didn't work right," Patricia replied. "The way I turned it made steam, so if I'd only just

turned it the *other* way it would have been water."

"How do you know it would?" Arabella asked in a teasing voice.

"How do you know it *wouldn't?*" Patricia replied, and Arabella chose to make no reply.

After the little happening in the conservatory on the evening of the party, Aunt Matilda spoke plainly to Arabella about her choice of playmates.

"I don't approve of that Lavine girl," she had said.

"You don't know her," ventured Arabella.

"I don't need to," was the curt reply. "A girl that can't go to a party without meddling with things, and getting into mischief, is not the girl that I care to have you with, and there's no reason why you

should go to the other end of the town to find a playmate; there are enough pleasant girls in your own school."

Aunt Matilda's words were true, but with Arabella's contrary nature, the fact that her aunt did not approve of Patricia, made her the most desirable of all her playmates.

She at once decided to spend the next Saturday with Patricia. She did not dare to ask Patricia to call for her, because Aunt Matilda, if exasperated, might send her home, and Patricia would never overlook that. She had just decided to invite herself to visit Patricia when something happened which delighted her.

It was after school, and they were talking of the coming Saturday, and how it should be spent.

"We've not seen you driving your pony for a long time," said Katie Dean.

"We are going out with Romeo on Saturday," Dorothy said.

"There's a lovely road where the great icicles hang from the trees like fringe, and the groom says it's the finest road for sleighing in Merrivale."

Patricia had not been to school, and had walked over to meet the pupils of the little private class.

"I suppose Nancy's going with you," Patricia said.

"Of course she will," said Katie, "don't you just know that Dorothy wouldn't care for the ride if Nancy weren't with her?"

Katie laughed as she said it, the others joining in the merriment, for it was well known that while Dorothy cared very truly for all her friends, Nancy was the dearest.

Patricia knew how handsome Romeo looked in his fine harness, and the trim little sleigh with its soft fur robes made a nice setting for Dorothy and Nancy as they spun over the glistening road. She determined to say something which would impress all who listened.

"I'll invite you to a sleighride with *me*, Arabella," she said, "will you go?"

"Yes, *indeed*," said Arabella, "what time shall I be ready?"

"You be over at my house 'bout two, and we'll go as soon as we want to," she said.

Nina looked at Jeanette, and when Patricia had left them she spoke the thought that was in her mind.

"I didn't know Patricia Lavine had a horse and sleigh. Has any one ever seen her driving?" she asked.

"Don't b'lieve she has," said Reginald.

Patricia had offended him that afternoon by calling him a *little* boy.

"You mustn't say that," said Katie, who, being a year older than her cousin Reginald, felt obliged to reprove him when things that he said were just a little too naughty.

"You just tell me, Katie Dean, do *you* b'lieve she has?" he asked, but Katie was talking to Mollie, and she chose to let him think that she had not heard his question.

The day set for the two sleighrides was clear and crisp.

Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte were entertaining each other with exchanging memories of Mrs. Dainty's school-days when with her classmates she had been as popular as Dorothy now was, and Aunt

Charlotte had found it a task to keep them under good discipline without quelling their high spirits.

The fire in the grate flamed higher and crackled merrily, and in the glow the two ladies were enjoying tea, small cakes, and bonbons.

"You may go for a short sleighride, if you wish," Mrs. Dainty said, "if you and Nancy will dress very warmly for the trip. Aunt Charlotte and I have decided to remain here cosily by the fire."

"But Romeo hasn't been out for days, and I don't mind the cold. It'll be just gay out in the crisp air," Dorothy said.

"Then surely you may go if it is to be so very gay," said Mrs. Dainty, laughing, "but remember what I said about wearing warm wraps and furs."

Dorothy promised, and soon, with the

groom riding behind them, they were off over the road.

Romeo was as delighted as they, and sped along as if shod with wings, his mane and tail floating gracefully as he almost flew along.

Dorothy and Nancy, nestled in a white fur robe, felt only the frosty touch of the sharp wind upon their cheeks, and they laughed and talked as if it had been a summer day.

On the dry bushes by the roadside great flocks of tiny sparrows hopped from twig to twig, chattering and twittering as they pecked at the little dried berries. A great crow flew out from a bit of woodland, making a noisy protest that any one should drive over the quiet road, and thus disturb his musings.

The icicles were glittering in the sun-

light, and the crust sparkled as if powdered with diamond dust, while the rough bark of the trees still held a coating of frost which the sunlight had not been warm enough to melt.

"We'll tell them how beautiful it looked when we get home," said Dorothy, her eyes bright with delight.

"It will take two of us to even *half* tell it," laughed Nancy.

And while Dorothy and Nancy were gliding rapidly over the frosty highway, Arabella was standing at Patricia's door, ringing the bell, and wondering why no one replied. Then some one came around the corner.

"Hello!" she cried. "Ma's gone to spend the afternoon with a friend, and I've just been out to see about our sleigh, so nobody heard you ring. The sleigh'll be

here in just a minute; you come up with me and help me bring down some shawls."

Without stopping to question, Arabella followed her up the three flights of stairs, and such an array of shawls as Patricia brought out!

"These sofa cushions I'll throw downstairs, and we can pick them up afterwards," she said.

Over the baluster she flung cushion after cushion, until Arabella's curiosity forced her to question.

"What ever *are* you going to do with all those cushions?" she asked.

Patricia looked very wise.

"Oh, you'll see," she said, and when she had reached the lower hall she peeped out.

"Here it is!" she said.

Arabella looked.

"Why, that's an old *pung!*" she said

"Well, who said it wasn't?" Patricia replied sharply; "but it isn't an *old* one *now*, because it has just been painted yellow. It's our grocer's, and the boy that drives it is going to let us ride in it this afternoon."

Arabella hesitated. She knew that Aunt Matilda did not wish her to be with Patricia at all, and she also felt that to ride in a yellow pung, lettered, "Fine Groceries, Butter, Cheese, and Eggs," was surely not aristocratic, and yet, what *fun* it would be!

CHAPTER X

THE PUNG RIDE

THE grocer's boy had delivered all of his parcels except two large paper bags which he had pushed over near the dasher. Patricia began to bring out the cushions, and the boy tossed them in upon the straw which lay upon the floor of the pung. Then Patricia and Arabella climbed in, the boy cracked his whip, the horse sprang forward with a surprising jolt, then settled down to a comical amble.

How cold it was! Arabella had wondered at the number of shawls which Patricia had taken. Now she was very glad to wrap two around her, while Patricia wore the other two.

"G'lang!" shouted the boy, and again the horse gave an amazing hop which sent the pung forward with a lurch, and rolled the two girls over upon the straw. Patricia thought it a joke, but Arabella, never very good-tempered, was actually angry.

"O dear!" she cried, "I think it's just horrid to be shaken up so. Well, I don't think you're very nice to laugh about it, Patricia. I wouldn't like to take any one out to a sleighride, and have 'em banged around, — oh, o-o!"

It was a "thank-you-ma'am" in the middle of the road that caused Arabella's angry speech to end in a little shriek.

It was useless for Patricia to try to hide her merriment. She could not help laughing. She rarely felt sorry for any one's discomfort, and really Arabella did look funny.

In the shake-up, her hat had been pushed over to one side of her head, but she did not know that, and her old-fashioned little face looked smaller than usual, because of the two heavy shawls which were crowded so high that she appeared to have no neck at all. Small as her face was, it could show a great deal of rage, and as she drew her shawls tighter around her, and glared at Patricia, she looked odd enough to make any one laugh.

"You look as if you'd like to spit like a cat," laughed Patricia, and just at that moment the boy who was driving turned to ask which way he should go.

"I got ter take them bags over ter the big old house what's painted the color er this pung, an' stands between a old barn an' a carriage shed. Know where 'tis?" he asked.

"Indeed, I don't," declared Patricia.

"Wal, I was goin' ter say that I kin git there by two different roads, an' I'd go the way ye'd like best ter go ef ye knew which that was," he said.

"I only know I want the ride, and this road is stupid and poky. Go the way that has the most houses on it," Patricia answered, and the boy turned into another avenue, and soon they were passing houses enough, such as they were!

Small houses that were dingy, and held one family, and larger ones that must have held three tribes at least, judging by the number of washings which hung upon the dilapidated piazzas.

"G'lang!" shouted the boy, but the nag had heard that too often to be impressed, and he only wagged one ear in response, but took not a step quicker.

Arabella was cold and provoked that she had come. Patricia was excited, and felt that she was having a frolic, and even Arabella's glum face could not quiet her; indeed, the more she looked at her, the more inclined was she to laugh.

Arabella felt aggrieved.

"The idea of laughing at *me*," she thought, "when I should think I might laugh at her for inviting me to ride in a sleigh that is only a *pung!*"

Then something happened which made Arabella forget that she was provoked with Patricia, because she suddenly became so vexed with some one else.

A short, stubby boy with a mass of hay-colored hair, ran out from a yard that they were passing.

"Ho! Look at the girlth a-havin' a ride out! Look at the horthe! My, thee hith

bonthe thtick out! Gueth they feed him on thawdutht an' shavingth, don't they, Mandy?"

"Oh, look at 'em! Look at 'em! Them's some er the *private* school; don't they look *grand* ridin' in Bill Tillson's grocery wagin?" shouted Mandy.

"I wonder if that horthe would jump if I fired a thnowball?"

"Don't ye do it!" shouted the driver.

"Better not, Chub!" cried Mandy, thinking that perhaps the fun had gone far enough.

The fact that he had been told not to made Chub long to do it.

"Here's the place," said the driver, and, grasping one of the bags, he jumped from the team and ran into the house with the parcel. The reins lay loosely upon the horse's back.

Chub, who had kept pace with the team, now paused to choose the most interesting bit of mischief. Should he make a grab at the loose-lying reins, and by jerking them surprise the horse, or would he be more frisky if the half-dozen snowballs which he had been making were all hurled at him at once?

Before he could decide, the boy came out of the house, and jumping into the pung, gathered up the reins, and attempted to turn the team towards home. Chub thought if he were to have any fun, he must get it quickly.

"*Heighoh!* You Jumpin' Ginger!" he shouted, at the same time letting fly the six snowballs. The frightened nag reared, and turning sharply about, tipped the pung, completely emptying it of passengers and freight.

"That'th a *thpill*! Girlth an' *onionth!* Girlth an' *onionth!*" shouted Chub, but Mandy, who was older, knew quite enough to be frightened, that is, frightened for her own safety. If the little girls were hurt, would some one blame her or Chub?

The driver had stopped the thoroughly terrified horse, the pung was not injured, so he thought he might see if the children were harmed.

Mandy had helped Arabella to her feet, and picked up her shawls, which had fallen off. She was more frightened than hurt, but her feelings were injured. Patricia, brushing the snow from her cloak, spoke her thoughts very plainly.

"Chub's a perfectly horrid boy," she said, "and we *might* have broken our necks."

"Ye *didn't*, though," said Mandy.

"And I shouldn't wonder if Ma had him put in the big lock-up," she said, "for scaring our horse, and tipping us out on the road. We may get *reumonia* for being thrown into the snow."

"Ye can't 'rest Chub; he ain't nothin' but a big baby," said Mandy, "an' what's *reumonia*, anyway?"

Patricia would not reply. The driver helped them to pick up the cushions, but the bag of onions, which he had forgotten to take to the big house, he left where they lay in the road. They were too widely scattered to be gathered up.

Chub found a huge one, and commenced to eat it as eagerly as if it had been a luscious bit of fruit.

"Thith ith *fine*," he said as he took a big bite from the onion.

"That Chub's a regular little pig," Pa-

tricia said, as they rode off, but her words were not heard by Mandy or Chub, for the youthful driver was shouting a loud warning to Chub to throw no more snowballs for fear of a sound thrashing followed by arrest, while Chub, afraid to throw the snowballs, hurled after the pung the worst names that he could think of.

"That horthe ith thlow ath a old moolly cow! It'th an old thlow-poke! What a thkinny nag! That horthe eath nothin' but newthpaper and thtring!" he yelled.

"That Chub is just a horrid-looking child," said Patricia, "an' he's the Jimmy boy's brother, but nobody'd ever think it."

"Who's the Jimmy boy?" Arabella asked.

"Why, don't you know the boy that we see sometimes at Dorothy Dainty's house?"

Arabella shook her head.

"I mean the one that wears a cap with a gold band on it, and a coat with brass buttons, and tries to walk like a man when Mr. Dainty sends him out with parcels," explained Patricia.

"Oh, I know," said Arabella, "but *he's* real *nice* looking, and Dorothy says her father thinks he's smart. I shouldn't think he could be brother to that little pig or that Mandy girl."

"Well, he is, and one thing Dorothy said one day I couldn't understand. She said that one reason why her father was so kind to Jimmy is because Jimmy helped to get Nancy Ferris home one time when she was stolen from them. Did you ever hear 'bout that? I don't see how just a boy could do that, do you?"

No, Arabella did not see, nor had she

heard the story, but she had seen Jimmy, and she wondered that he belonged to such a family as that which produced Mandy and Chub.

"Ye're 'most home," declared the driver, "an' soon's I've landed ye I'll hev ter scoot."

"But you'll have to take Arabella home; she lives 'way over the other side of the town," insisted Patricia.

"Oh, no, no, he *won't!*" said Arabella. "I'd rather walk all the way than have Aunt Matilda know that I've been sleighing."

"Why, how funny!" and Patricia stared in surprise.

"It's funnier now than it would be when Aunt Matilda found it out."

"Why?" Patricia asked.

"Because," said Arabella, "whenever

I've been out, and she thinks I've taken cold, she boils some old herb tea, and makes me drink it hot, and I have to be bundled in blankets, and she makes such a fuss that I wish I hadn't gone anywhere at all."

"I guess you'd better not tell her," Patricia advised, to which Arabella replied:

"I just don't intend to."

And while Dorothy and Nancy were standing before a blazing fire in the sitting-room at the stone house, recounting the beauties of the sky, the branches fringed with glittering icicles, the squirrels that raced across the hard crust of snow, and indeed, every lovely bit of road or forest which they had seen, Arabella, shivering as she hurried along, saw the bright lights, and rushed past the great gate, across the avenue and in at her own driveway. She

hoped that every one would be talking when she entered. She intended to join in the conversation, and she thought if she could manage to talk very, *very* fast, Aunt Matilda might not ask where she had been. But she did.

Arabella had removed her hat and cloak, and trying very hard to stop shivering, she pushed aside the portière, and stood in the glow of the shaded lamp.

"Warmer weather to-morrow, the paper says, and I guess we shall all be glad to have it," Aunt Matilda was saying.

"It w-would be f-fine to h-h-have it w-w-warmer," said Arabella, her teeth chattering so that she thought every one must hear them rattle.

Over her paper Aunt Matilda's bright eyes peered at the little girl who shivered in spite of her effort to stand very still.

"Where have you been, Arabella? You're chilled through. I say, where have you been?"

"I've just taken quite a long walk," Arabella replied.

"If you've taken a long walk as late as this in the afternoon, you've come some distance. Have you been spending this whole afternoon at that Lavine girl's house?"

"No'm," said Arabella, "I haven't been in her house *any* of the afternoon; I've been out-of-doors."

Aunt Matilda threw up her hands in amazement, as if a number of hours in the open air ought to have actually killed Arabella, whereas, she really was alive, but exceedingly chilly.

Then the very thing happened which Arabella had told Patricia would happen.

Aunt Matilda had her old-fashioned notions regarding the care of children, and Arabella was sent to bed, packed in blankets, after having drank a pint bowl full of the worst-tasting herb tea which Aunt Matilda had ever brewed.

She had thought that she might drink half of it, and then throw the rest away, but as if guessing her intention, Aunt Matilda stood close beside her to be sure that not a drop was wasted.

"It's no use to make such an outrageous face, Arabella," she remarked, "for the worse it tastes the more good it's *sure* to do."

"But I'd 'most rather have a cold than take that stuff," wailed Arabella.

"That's the time you don't have your choice," was the dry reply.

And indeed she did not, for besides taking

the despised herb tea, she awoke the next morning with a heavy cold that kept her away from school for the whole of the next week.

CHAPTER XI

AN UNEXPECTED TRIP

THE next Saturday proved to be warm and sunny, and Mrs. Dainty had taken an early train for the city, intending to spend the day in shopping.

It had been necessary that Dorothy should go with her, because there was a new cloak to be "tried on." Mrs. Dainty had wished to have Mrs. Grayson with her, but both had thought that Nancy would be lonely.

"If I were to spend the day in the stores, Nancy, I would take you with me, because you always enjoy shopping," Aunt Charlotte said, "but I am to visit a friend

who is ill, and that would be very dull for you, and if you go with Dorothy, you will think that the hours drag if you sit waiting while her cloak is being fitted."

"Oh, but I shall not mind being at home *this* time," Nancy said, cheerfully; "I shall play with Flossie and Mollie all the forenoon, — "

"And the maid will serve your lunch at *my* house at one," Dorothy said.

"And I'll ask them both to come over to the cottage to play with me this afternoon," Nancy continued, "and before we're done playing you'll return."

And the forenoon was quite as pleasant as she had thought it would be. She had gone over to Mollie's, and found Flossie already there, and they had played tag and hide-and-seek just as if it had been a summer day. The sunlight was warm, the

breeze soft and sweet, and every bit of snow had vanished. It was like spring-time, and they played without ceasing until the hour for lunch.

"We'll come over to the cottage together this afternoon," called Mollie, as Nancy hurried away towards the stone house.

She knew that lunch was always served promptly as the hands upon the dining-room clock pointed to the hour of one.

She was rather afraid of the burly butler, because he stood so very erect, and never, *never* smiled even when the jokes told at the table were very funny. But the maid's eyes often twinkled, and Nancy hoped that it would be the maid who would serve her.

She was surprised to find that lunching alone in the great dining-room was not very cheerful after all, and after a hasty

meal, she slipped from her chair, refusing to taste any more of the dainties which the maid offered her.

"You've not had much lunch, Miss Nancy," the girl said, "you might take an orange, and eat it away from the table if you like."

Nancy took the big orange, and after much coaxing, pushed it into her pocket, and soon forgot that she had it. It was only quarter-past one. She looked again at the clock. Yes, that was just what it said; quarter-past one, and Mollie and Flossie were still at lunch. She remembered that they rarely came out to play in the afternoon before half-past two. She wondered where she would rather spend the time. At the cottage she could play with the kitten, get out the new game that Mrs. Dainty had given her, or read her newest

book, but Dorothy's books were up in the playroom of the stone house, and she was always free to read them. No, she would not stay indoors. She would go out and be ready to greet her playmates as soon as she saw them running down the avenue.

She put on her cloak and hat, and walked slowly through the hall, thus using up as much time as possible. The house stood high, and from the doorway she could see the avenue. There was no one yet in sight.

She strolled down the driveway, intending to wait at the great gate for her playmates to appear.

The gates were wide open, and as Nancy looked out, some one rushed past her. The plainly dressed young woman turned to look at the little girl.

"Oh, Nancy!" she cried, and "Why, Sue!" cried Nancy.

"D'ye live in that el'gant place Nancy? Why, it looks like er palace!"

"Mrs. Dainty lives there, and I'm there 'most all the time playing with Dorothy. I live in that dear little stone cottage with Aunt Charlotte," Nancy said, "but Sue, how happened you to be here? Aren't you working for the doctor?"

"Nancy, I come *purpose* ter see yer," said the girl, bending to look into Nancy's face; "I wondered if you'd remember me."

"Oh, how *could* I forget you, Sue? It was you who used to be kind to me when Uncle Steve was cross, and when I was sick you sent my little note to Aunt Charlotte so that she and Mrs. Dainty came for me."

"I done what I could for yer, Nancy, an' now I've come ter ax yer ter do some-

thin' that I'm 'fraid ye won't want ter do."

Eagerly Nancy looked up into Sue's honest face.

"I'd do *anything* for you, Sue, because you were good to me when no one else was kind. You were working for Uncle Steve, and you were as afraid of him as I was, but you helped me, and you knew he'd be angry if he found it out."

"Ye're a kind little thing; ye'd do it quick fer me, but it ain't fer me I'm askin'," Sue replied.

"Is it for the doctor who helped me to get well? I'd do something just as quick for him. Uncle Steve was going to *make* me dance when I was sick, but the big doctor said I shouldn't, and Uncle Steve didn't dare."

As she spoke Nancy's clear brown eyes

looked up into Sue's blue ones, and Sue's cheek flushed. She looked down at the sidewalk.

"It ain't fer the doctor," she said; "he's gone ter Europe, but he's payin' my wages whilst he's gone, an' I'm stayin' with a woman what I worked fer before. Nancy, it's yer aunt I'm with, an' it's her that made me come!"

Nancy started back in terror. With frightened eyes she stared a moment at the girl, then turned to run.

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy! Come here!" cried Sue. "Ye don't understand."

Nancy paused, but she did not take a step nearer.

Sue hastened towards her, and Nancy seemed about to run again.

"Don't run away, Nancy," pleaded the girl, "I know what ye think; ye think yer

Uncle Steve's after yer, but ye can be sure he ain't. Yer Uncle Steve's dead, an' I do'no's ye need try ter be very sorry."

Nancy came back to where Sue was standing.

"Is it *true?*" she asked.

"Honest an' true," said Sue, "an' all yer aunt wants me ter git yer fer is because she's sick, an' she wants ter see yer. Oh, if yer could see her, Nancy, ye'd hate ter say 'no.' She keeps askin' fer yer all day, an' when I told her I'd find yer, an' ask yer ter come an' jest let her look at yer, she looked brighter'n she had fer days."

"But I'm afraid to go to the city to see her," said Nancy.

"She ain't in the city. She's in a town only a little ways from here. Ye could go with me in just no time, an' ye'd do her so much good."

"Why?"

Nancy asked the question in wonder. It seemed strange that her aunt, who had never loved her, should now long to see her.

"She's got something she wants ter give yer, an' she's got something she wants ter say, an' she says she can't rest till she sees ye. It's her worryin' that won't let her git well. Ef she could see ye fer a little talk, an' tell ye what she wants ter tell, I guess she'd git well right off. Seems ef ye'd *ought* ter come with me, ef it'll do so much good."

Nancy's eyes were full of tears, and her sensitive lips quivered.

"Oh, I *wish* I knew what to do!" she cried, clasping her hands together very tightly.

"Why, ask 'em ter let ye go," said Sue; "they'd let ye ef they knew yer Uncle

Steve wasn't there, an' yer aunt was jest pinin' ter see yer."

"I'm *'most* sure they would if they *knew*, but everybody's away. If only Aunt Charlotte or Mrs. Dainty were here, I'd ask them."

"Can't ye write a note, an' leave it at the cottage where yer Aunt Charlotte'll find it as soon's she gits home? Ye kin tell her I took yer ter yer aunt what's sick, an' ef ye tell her 'bout yer Uncle Steve, she won't worry."

Nancy hesitated.

"An' I hate ter hurry yer," Sue urged, "but I'll *hev* ter be gittin' back ter yer aunt, so I must go with yer, er else leave ye here, an' tell her I couldn't coax ye ter come."

"Oh, don't tell her *that*. If she's want-

"I'll go if you'll promise to bring me back."— *Page 211.*

ing so much to see me, I guess I *ought* to go," Nancy said, but her voice trembled. Even although Sue had assured her that Uncle Steve was not living, the old fear of *any* member of his family made her hesitate.

"I'm so glad ter see ye agin, Nancy," coaxed Sue, "an' ye'd ought ter feel reel safe with *me.*"

"I'll go," Nancy said, "if you'll *promise* to *bring* me *back!*"

"Why, of course I will," said Sue, and after a moment's hesitating, Nancy ran over to the cottage, wrote a hasty note, which she left upon the table, and then, with her heart beating fast, and her lashes still wet with tears, she walked swiftly down the avenue with Sue.

Sue was delighted to be with Nancy

again, and she had no idea that she was doing anything which could possibly cause Nancy's friends any uneasiness.

She had intended to call at the house, and ask permission to take Nancy to her aunt.

Having met Nancy at the gate, she had learned that there was no one at home, but she had urged Nancy to leave a note at the cottage telling where she had gone, and with whom, and she felt that that made the whole affair open and honest. Nancy's loving little heart was less light. She thought that it must be right to go with Sue, and if her aunt was so *very* sick, why surely she ought not to delay going to her, but if only dear Aunt Charlotte had been at home she could have *asked* her; could have just asked her.

Sue talked all the way, but Nancy said

little, and when they had nearly reached the depot she looked back, and as she looked, wondered if, even then, she ought to run back to the cottage. Then the thought of her aunt calling constantly for her caused her once more to think that it must be right for her to go.

There were not many minutes in which to think about it, for when Sue had bought their tickets, the whistle of a locomotive was heard coming around a bend of the road, and almost before Nancy knew it they were seated in the car, and spinning over the rails towards the little town where her aunt was now living.

It was all like a dream. She saw the tall trees, the broad fields now brown, yet bare of snow, because the warm sun had melted it, the church spires of other villages standing out clearly against the blue sky, but

they blurred and became indistinct, because she could not keep back the tears. She was not really crying, but as fast as the tears were forced back, others would come, and she turned from the window to hear what Sue was saying.

"I say it's only three stations more, an' then we'll be there, an' when ye see how much good it'll do yer aunt, ye'll be glad ye come," she said.

Nancy's eyes brightened. If it was to do so much good, then she had done right. It must be that she really ought to be on her way towards the little house, and Sue had promised to return with her.

And now the train, which had been flying along, slackened its speed, and a frowzy-haired brakeman thrust his head into the car doorway, shouting something, Nancy could not tell what.

"Here we are," said Sue, as she rose to her feet.

Nancy slipped from the seat, and together they left the car and stepped out upon the platform.

"I didn't ask ye ef ye wanted ter bring anything with yer?" said Sue. "Ye could hev packed a little bag with anything ye'd want while ye was here."

"Why, what should I want to bring in a bag?" Nancy asked in surprise.

"I didn't know but you'd want a apron, a night-gown, or something," Sue replied.

Nancy stood still in the middle of the road, and stared at Sue.

"A *night-dress!* Why, aren't you coming back with me to-night?"

"Why, Nancy, don't stop there. I thought I told ye that yer aunt wanted yer ter visit her."

"You said she wanted to look at me, and that she had something to give me, and something to tell me, but that wouldn't take long, and I ought to go home to-night."

"But there's no train home ter-night, Nancy. This is a little town, an' there's only two er three trains a day. Ye *must* hev told in yer letter that ye was goin' ter *visit* yer aunt, didn't yer?"

"I don't know whether I *said* visit or not, but truly I didn't think you meant to stay over night," Nancy replied.

"Wal, I guess ye said so, an' here's the street. It's only a lane, an' that little bit of a house where the cat sits on the step is the one where yer aunt lives. It's kind er cosy, ain't it?"

Nancy did not notice Sue's question. She was looking at the little house, the

tiny fruit-trees in the yard, and the white cat that sat upon the upper step, washing its face in the sun.

The place looked very poor and small after the Dainty mansion and the trim stone cottage. But small though it was, it looked far better than the old house in the city where Steve Ferris had taken her, when he had stolen her from her home and friends.

CHAPTER XII

THE NECKLACE

NANCY could not help making friends with the white cat, and it purred with delight at being noticed. Sue slipped a key into the lock, and opened the door. They entered the tiny hall, and the white cat followed them, as they walked towards a little room at the rear.

"Is that you, Sue? Did ye see her? Did she come?" called a thin, tired voice.

Sue opened the door of the sitting-room and Nancy ran in, all sympathy now for the aunt who was really ill.

Mrs. Ferris lay upon an old carpet-covered lounge, and she raised herself upon

her elbow to look at Nancy as she stood before her.

"Set down on that little stool, Nancy," she said, "so I kin look at ye better. My! But ye look well an' strong 'side er what ye did when I last seen ye, whilst I've grown sick an' tired. But seein' ye'll do me good, an' ter-morrer I'll talk with ye. They's some things I *must* say, but I'll rest ter-night, an' tell ye ter-morrer."

Nancy looked the fear that she felt, and Mrs. Ferris hastened to reassure her.

"Ye're safe here, Nancy," she said. "There ain't nobody here ter harm ye. Like 'nough Sue remembered ter tell ye 'bout yer Uncle Steve."

Nancy nodded, and was about to speak when Mrs. Ferris continued:

"I don't want ter speak hard 'bout him now, an' I don't hev ter. Ye was with us

long 'nough ter know what yer Uncle Steve was like, but I will tell ye one thing: we didn't hev no luck after ye left us. Steve kept ye dancin' at the theatre, an' they paid well fer dancin', too. Then ye was sick, an' them two ladies come an' took yer home. After that we went from one place ter another, Steve workin' when he felt like it, an' not workin' when he *didn't* feel like it, which was most er the time. Since he's went, I've worked hard at sewin', an' with a few boarders I've managed ter save 'nough ter buy this little house. It didn't cost much. It's in a out-er-the-way place, an' they's only four rooms in it, but ef I kin git well agin I'll earn 'nough ter git along."

She lay back against the pillow as if telling the story had tired her.

The clock upon the little mantel ticked

loudly, and the white cat blinked at it a moment, then sprang up into Nancy's lap. She clasped her arms around it, and bending, laid her cheek against its head.

Mrs. Ferris opened her eyes, and lay watching Nancy, as she caressed the cat.

"I like ter see ye here," she said, "an' ter-morrer I'll tell ye why I sent fer ye."

The kitchen door opened, and the scent of brewing tea came in with Sue as she entered with a little tray which she placed upon a chair near Mrs. Ferris.

"There's yer tea an' toast," she said, "an' ye kin help yerself while me an' Nancy has some in the kitchen."

And while Nancy sat beside Sue, and tried very hard to like the coarse food offered her, her friends at the great stone house found it impossible to taste the tempting dishes which graced their table.

Mr. Dainty was away from home on important business, and Mrs. Dainty had asked Aunt Charlotte to come to the house with Nancy, and stay with her until he should return.

So when Mrs. Dainty's shopping was finished, and Aunt Charlotte had left the house of her friend, they had met at the station, and had found seats in the first car of the train. Their carriage was waiting for them when they arrived at Merrivale, and all the way up the avenue Dorothy talked of the gift which she had bought for Nancy, and of Nancy's delight when she should see it.

But no Nancy ran out to greet them, nor was she in sight when they entered the hall.

In sudden terror Dorothy had thrown herself down into a cushioned chair, and

no words of comfort could stop her sobbing or stay her hot tears. That Nancy was stolen, never to return, she earnestly believed, and although Mrs. Dainty tried to quiet her, and to assure her that her playmate would doubtless soon be found, she only shook her head, and cried at the thought that her Nancy was not with her.

The maid was sent to the cottage to see if any accident had befallen her which kept her there, while the butler, in the interest which he felt, forgot his dignity and begged permission to call at the homes of her little friends to learn if she were there.

He soon returned with the news that Mollie and Flossie had played with her all the forenoon, and had promised to go over to the cottage after lunch; that they did so, but they found no one to play with, and

after waiting for some time, they ran home, unable to understand why Nancy had not been waiting to greet them.

Then the maid entered.

"If ye please, Mrs. Grayson, I found this paper on yer table. I do'no' what it is, fer I'd not be readin' what wa'n't writ ter me, but wonderin' if it was writ by Miss Nancy, I've brought it ter ye."

Dorothy sat with wide eyes and pale cheeks, her slender fingers tightly clasping the arms of the chair. Could the note be from Nancy? Would it tell where she was?

Mrs. Dainty leaned over Aunt Charlotte's chair, and together they read the hastily pencilled note.

"Dear Aunt Charlotte: — I guess you remember Sue, I've forgotten what her other name is, but she's the girl that

worked for Uncle Steve, and was so good to me when I was sick. She called to-day, and says my aunt is sick and thinks she *must* see me, and you needn't think I'm stolen, because Uncle Steve is dead, so he couldn't steal me again.

"My aunt doesn't live in the city. Sue meant to ask you if I could go, but you were away, and she said I ought to go so I did. I'll be right home as soon as my aunt has told me what Sue says she's *got* to tell. Lovingly,

"NANCY."

"The dear child has not told us *where* her aunt lives, only that she is *not* in the city. What are we to do?"

Aunt Charlotte's face was pale as she asked the question, and the hand which held the note shook so that the bit of paper

rustled like a leaf as it lay against her silk gown.

"We can do nothing to-night," Mrs. Dainty replied, "but to-morrow at daybreak the search must commence. I try to find comfort in the fact that the girl, Sue, seemed to be honest, and certainly she was straightforward if she intended to ask us if she might take Nancy to her aunt, and to insist that she write a note explaining her absence."

"I am sure that the girl's intentions are honest, but I am *not* so sure of the woman who sent her to get Nancy. Steve Ferris is dead, but while it was he who once stole Nancy, it was his wife who helped him to keep her. I am frightened, and I can not believe that she has sent for her only for the pleasure of seeing her."

Mrs. Dainty turned quickly to see if

Dorothy had heard what Aunt Charlotte had said, but Dorothy was questioning the maid to learn when she had last seen Nancy. Aunt Charlotte's words, which surely would have frightened her, had passed unnoticed.

It was late before any member of the household could think of sleeping, and when at last Dorothy lay dreaming of Nancy, her long lashes were wet with tears.

Mrs. Dainty had tried to comfort and cheer her by telling her that *this* time they knew with whom Nancy was staying, and that Sue, who had once before helped them to find her, would, doubtless, bring her back.

Dorothy had listened patiently, but when Mrs. Dainty kissed her and said "good night," Dorothy threw her arms about her neck.

"Oh, mamma, I know we have Nancy's note," she said, "and Sue *was* good to her once, but how do we know what her aunt will do? What if she means to make her dance at a theatre, just as her Uncle Steve did?"

And Mrs. Dainty could find no words with which to comfort her, because her own heart was filled with that very thought which made Dorothy so unhappy.

And when the bright sunlight streamed in through the windows of the stone house it found every one wide awake and full of excitement, eager to be doing something towards finding Nancy, but in doubt as to what to do first.

It was Mrs. Dainty's calmness that stilled their excitement, her cool head that directed their efforts, her firm will which chose to guide, rather than command.

And while every effort was being made to find Nancy, and to learn if she were safe, Nancy lay upon an old bed in the little house in the country lane, and slept soundly, after having cried herself to sleep the night before.

She awoke with a start when a stray sunbeam came in through the tiny window and touched her cheek.

For a moment she stared at the glint of light which danced upon the wall, then a puzzled look came into her brown eyes, and she rubbed them as if in that way she might better see, and understand her strange surroundings.

Then suddenly she remembered all about it. Why she was in so shabby a room, and why she was there at all. Ah, yes, Sue had brought her, and she had thought that she should return that night.

Now the morning had come, and with it the hope that before night she would be again in her own home, and with those who were dear to her.

She listened. There was not a sound of any one stirring, nor was there any slight noises out-of-doors which told of busy people up and about at early morning. She had forgotten that they were not on a public highway. In the little lane there was continual quiet whether at dawn or at high noon, so that one might have thought the whole town asleep, or at least napping.

And shabby as the bed was upon which Nancy lay, it was far more comfortable than the old lounge which Sue had chosen to occupy.

She had tried to honor Nancy as her

guest, and so had given her the best resting-place which the cottage afforded.

Nancy wondered if Sue were yet awake.

"Sue!" she whispered.

"Yes," whispered Sue in reply.

"Isn't it time to get up now?"

"Not yet," said Sue, "fer Mis' Ferris don't hev her breakfast till 'bout ten, an' it ain't pleasant ter wander 'round a cold house when there ain't no reason fer it, an' she don't want wood burned fer a fire until I use it ter git breakfast with. Ye might try ter git ter sleep agin; they's nothin' else ter do."

One glance around the dingy chamber would have told any one that much could be done before a ten-o'clock breakfast, but Mrs. Ferris wished the house to be quiet during the early hours of the morning.

And in spite of the fact that she was very wide awake, Nancy did go to sleep.

At first she amused herself by staring at the odd-shaped scrolls and blossoms upon the paper. There were blue and yellow flowers with bright green leaves, supported upon latticework of a queer shade of brown.

Nancy thought the vines looked as if they were crawling, and that the yellow blossoms were shaped like huge bugs. The longer she looked at it the more it seemed as if those vines did really move upon the wall. While she watched them she dropped to sleep and dreamed that she was trying to dance, but could not do the graceful steps which she so well knew, because those vines had come down from the wall, and were tangled about her feet.

When she again awoke the sun was shi-

ning brightly, and she could hear the rattling of dishes down in the little kitchen.

She sprang up, and hurriedly dressed, wondering why Sue had not called her. There was frost upon the window-pane, and she shivered. Each garment which she put on seemed colder than the one before.

She searched the room for a button-hook, and finding none, ran down to the kitchen.

"Thought I wouldn't call ye till we got a bit warmed up," said Sue.

"What's that? No. I ain't seen no button-hook in this place, but ye jest set on that chair an' I'll fasten yer boots fer ye."

She took a huge, crooked hair-pin from her hair, and buttoned Nancy's boots with wonderful speed, when the tool which she worked with was considered.

And what a breakfast that was, which

Nancy ate from a blue-edged pie-plate that was badly crackled.

A small piece of very tough ham, an egg fried for ten minutes, until it looked and tasted like leather, a boiled potato the color of lead, and a biscuit of about the same hue.

"I don't s'pose ye're used ter drinkin' tea, but I guess I'll give ye some ter wash yer bread down. That biscuit's kinder dry," and she offered Nancy a cup of drink, which, from its flavor, might have been tea — or anything else.

The little kitchen was dingy, and the food not at all like the appetizing fare which she usually enjoyed, but she was hungry, and Sue felt flattered that Nancy ate the breakfast which she had served.

And after breakfast how the hours dragged!

Nancy was anxious to be starting for home, yet she could do nothing to hasten the time when she could go. Sue was busy with the ordinary work of the morning, and Mrs. Ferris had told her to tell Nancy that she would talk with her after dinner. That she felt too ill to see her until afternoon.

"'Tain't no use ter fret, Nancy," said Sue, "she ain't good fer much till after dinner, but I guess she'll talk with ye then fast 'nough."

"But I'm wild to get back to the cottage," wailed Nancy.

"Ye couldn't git there ter-day, fer this is Sunday, and we don't hev but two trains that stop here Sundays. One leaves here at half-past seven in the morning, an' the other stops here at half-past nine at night, but that one goes ter the city, an' that

would be going right away from Merrivale."

Nancy made no reply, but turned to look from the window.

"To-morrow will be Monday, and I *must* get back to school," she thought.

It was late in the afternoon when Mrs. Ferris called Nancy to listen to what she had to say.

"I kin talk ter ye now," she said, "an' first I'll ask ye ef ye remember the old house in Merrivale where ye used ter live before Mis' Dainty give ye a home?"

"I guess I *do*," said Nancy.

"Wal, 'twa'n't much of er livin' ye had, an' the woman what took keer of ye was only yer *stepmother*. Did ye know that?"

"Some of the children told me," Nancy replied.

"Wal, did any one ever tell ye 'bout yer *own* mother?"

Nancy stared in round-eyed surprise.

"Why, if she was my *stepmother*, of course I must have had an own mother once, but I never thought of it."

"She was a beauty, an' ye'll look like her when ye're a young lady. Her hair was dark an' curly, an' her figger was graceful. Her big dark eyes was melting, an' she could dance, oh, how she could dance!"

"My mamma danced?" questioned Nancy.

"She danced like a fairy. She was a stage dancer; there's where ye got yer nimble toes, but she died when ye wasn't a year old, an' yer father married that other woman who wa'n't nobody at all. Yer own ma was called 'Ma'm'selle Nan-

nette ' on the play-bills, an' she was a good woman, a sweet woman as ever lived."

"I wish I'd known her," Nancy said, her eyes filled with tears at the thought of the beautiful young mother whom she had never known.

"An' one thing I sent fer yer fer was this," and Mrs. Ferris took a small box from beneath her shawl. "What's in this box belonged ter yer own ma, an' how Steve got hold of it I don't know. I found it 'mong his things, an' when I see yer ma's name on to it, I knew he'd no right ter hev it. I took an' hid it, an' Steve tore 'round like mad a-tellin' that he'd been robbed, but he didn't say anything ter the perlice, 'cause he knew it didn't b'long ter him in the first place."

She opened the box and held up a slender gold necklace set with tiny brilliants.

Nancy clasped her hands together, and gasped, "Oh!—O—O!"
Page 239.

Nancy clasped her hands together, and gasped, "Oh-o-o," in admiration.

"There's the name on the clasp," said Mrs. Ferris.

"When I found it I wondered why he hadn't sold it when he was hard up, which was often 'nough, goodness knows, but after I hid it, he said he'd kept holdin' on to it fer the time when he'd need the money more, but I think he was *'fraid* ter sell it. Knowin' 'twa'n't his'n, he thought he *might* git 'cused er hevin' stolen it."

Nancy took the pretty necklace, and held it so that it sparkled like dewdrops.

It was truly a charming bit of jewelry, not costly, but tasteful, and just what one might think would have shone resplendent upon the white throat of the beautiful Nannette.

"It's yours by good rights," Mrs. Ferris

said, " an' I ain't like Steve was; I don't want nothin' that don't b'long ter me.

" Now I've given that ter ye, I feel some better. I've felt like a thief ever since I found it, an' knew who it b'longed ter. They's a note in the little box, an' when ye've puzzled over the flourishes done in fancy ink, ye kin read that that necklace was presented ter Ma'm'selle Nannette by, I forgot who, fer her beautiful dancin'."

Nancy looked as if she listened in a dream.

" An' one thing more I want ter tell ye. I never approved er Steve's stealin' ye. I told him 'twa'n't right, but he wouldn't listen, an' I couldn't help ye. I was as 'fraid er him as ye was, an' he was so headstrong, I had ter let him do as he wanted ter. I'm tired now, and ye'd better run

out ter the kitchen with Sue. I know I'll feel better now I've freed my mind."

Nancy hurried to Sue to tell the wonderful story, and to show the necklace.

" And here's her name on the large flat side of the clasp," she said.

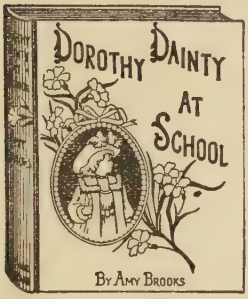
Sue's eyes sparkled with delight.

" And I didn't like to ask her how soon I could go home, just when she'd given the pretty thing to me, but, Sue," she continued, " don't you think she means *surely* to let me go as early as to-morrow? "

" I do'no' what she means ter do, that is, not *exactly*, but p'raps ye won't hev ter ask her. Maybe she'll tell ye 'thout any teasin'."

Those who would like to see Dorothy and her many friends again, and to learn what became of Nancy, may meet them all again in " Dorothy Dainty in the Country."

The Dorothy Dainty Series



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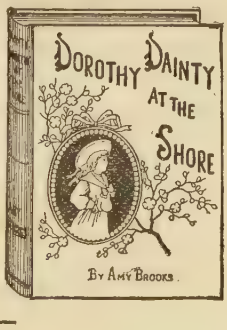

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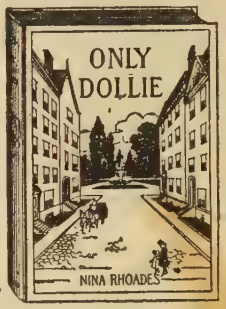

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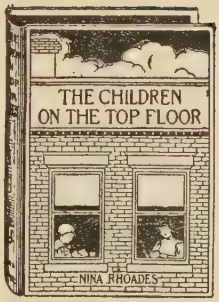

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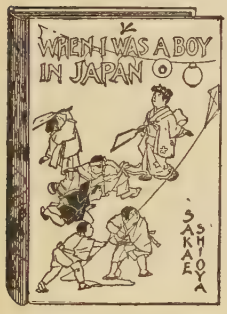

THE author was born fifty miles from Tokio, and at the age of twelve began the study of English at a Methodist school. Later he studied Natural Science in the First Imperial College at Tokio, after which he taught English and Mathematics. He came to America in 1901, received the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Chicago, and took a two years' post-graduate course at Yale before returning to Japan. No one could be better qualified to introduce the Japanese to those in America, and he has done it in a way that will delight both children and parents.

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